



June 2010

VA Proposes New Regulations to Assist Vietnam Veterans Exposed to Agent Orange

By Rick Stewart, Arapahoe County Veteran Service Officer

Nineteen million gallons of herbicides including Agent Orange were used during the Vietnam War to destroy crops and defoliate trees to remove concealment of the enemy. Exposure to Agent Orange (dioxin) has devastating health effects that are still endangering the health and very lives of our Vietnam veterans today.

If a veteran served in Vietnam during the war and has an illness on the presumptive condition list for Agent Orange exposure, they should file a service connected disability claim with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). This is called a presumptive disability claim. This "presumption" eliminates the burden of proof for the veteran to link the illness with military service. The current list of presumptive conditions for Agent Orange exposure during the Vietnam War are:

- AL Amyloidosis,
- Acute and Subacute Transient Peripheral Neuropathy,
- Diabetes Mellitus (Type 2),
- Chloracne or other Acneform Disease consistent with Chloracne,
- Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia (CLL),
- Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma,
- Porphyria Cutanea Tarda,
- Prostate Cancer,
- Respiratory Cancers (cancer of the lung, larynx, or trachea), and
- Soft Tissue Sarcoma (other than Osteosarcoma Chondrosarcoma, Kaposi's sarcoma, or Mesothelioma).

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki has proposed that three new illnesses be added to the current list of health problems associated with exposure to Agent Orange and other herbicides. If this regulation passes,

B cell Leukemia, Parkinson's disease and ischemic heart disease will be added to the current list of presumptive conditions for Agent Orange exposure in Vietnam.

"This is an important step forward for Vietnam veterans suffering from these three illnesses," said Secretary Shinseki.

If passed, this new regulation will provide Service Connected Disability benefits to tens of thousands of Vietnam veterans, their dependents or widows. The VA will also look at over 80,000 past claims. These veterans might be eligible for retroactive payment and enrollment into VA healthcare. Approval of this regulation is tentatively set for Fall 2010.

It has been estimated that only one third of all U.S. veterans who served in Vietnam are still alive. This heartbreaking fact means that 390 Vietnam veterans die each day. Many of these veterans passed away as a direct result of exposure to Agent Orange.

For more information or assistance with filing a claim for VA benefits please seek the professional advocacy of an accredited Veteran Service Officer. The Arapahoe County Veterans Service Office can be reached at 303-738-8045.