



Rensselaer County Veterans Newsletter

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STEVEN F. McLAUGHLIN
County Executive

Rensselaer County
Unified Family Services
Veterans Service Agency
1600 Seventh Avenue
Troy, NY 12180
Phone: (518) 270-2760
FAX: (518) 270-2956
www.rensco.com

Van Transportation...

- * *Don't drive* and need to get to the VA Medical Center?
- * We offer complimentary van transportation to and from the VAMC for *most morning* medical appointments.

For more information please call (518) 270-2760.

Upcoming Events...

December 7th...Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day

December 12th...Honor-a-Deceased Veteran Ceremony in the Legislative Chambers at 8:15 am, *Henry G. A. Higgitt—NYARNG, WWI & USN, WWII*

December 26th...*OFFICE CLOSED (Christmas Day Observed)*

January 2nd...*OFFICE CLOSED (New Year's Day Observed)*

January 9th...Honor-a-Deceased Veteran Ceremony in the Legislative Chambers at 8:15 am, *TBD*

January 16th...Martin Luther King Day—*OFFICE CLOSED*

A Message from our County Executive

Fall is in full swing, and once again, Rensselaer County demonstrated that we do not forget those who served with a series of ceremonies for Veterans Day. I was proud to represent the county at a number of those events and impressed by those who turned out.

Among the meaningful events for Veterans Day were the walk to several monuments in downtown Troy, special lunches at county senior centers, an observance at Green Meadow Elementary School in the East Greenbush Central School District, annual Veterans Breakfast at the Melvin Roads American Legion in East Greenbush, observance at the Sand Lake Veterans Memorial and the Stephentown Veterans ceremony at the town's veteran park.

Thanks to our veterans and their families for their service and dedication to protecting freedom, and thanks also to those who helped organize, support or attend the veteran observances. The ceremonies included veterans from World War II to Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf and the more recent War on Terror. Every veteran deserves our thanks and appreciation, and we work every day to remember and serve our veterans. Special thanks also to Gold Star mother Carrie Farley for attending veteran observances.

This Veterans Day was also the first without our friend and longtime Veteran Service Agency Director Peter Goebel. Peter passed away in September after a serious illness, and he is missed by those he worked with and the veterans he served and called friends. A West Point graduate, Peter served with the U.S. Army over the course of four decades and was a patriotic and dedicated member of our team. Godspeed, Peter Goebel.

Sincerely,

Steven F. McLaughlin

What's the PACT Act and how will it affect my VA benefits and care?

The PACT Act is perhaps the largest health care and benefit expansion in VA history. The full name of the law is The Sergeant First Class (SFC) Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act.

The PACT Act will bring these changes:

- Expands and extends eligibility for VA health care for Veterans with toxic exposures and Veterans of the Vietnam, Gulf War, and post-9/11 eras
- Adds 20+ more presumptive conditions for burn pits, Agent Orange, and other toxic exposures
- Adds more presumptive-exposure locations for Agent Orange and radiation
- Requires the VA to provide a toxic exposure screening to every Veteran enrolled in VA health care
- Helps the VA to improve research, staff education, and treatment related to toxic exposures

If you're a Veteran or survivor, you can file claims now to apply for PACT Act-related benefits.

What does it mean to have a presumptive condition for toxic exposure?

To get a VA disability rating, your disability must connect to your military service. For many health conditions, you need to prove that your service caused your condition.

But for some conditions, we automatically assume (or "presume") that your service caused your condition. We call these "presumptive conditions."

The VA considers a condition presumptive when it's established by law or regulation.

If you have a presumptive condition, you don't need to prove that your service caused the condition. You only need to meet the service requirements for the presumption.

Gulf War era and post-9/11 Veteran eligibility

What burn pit and other toxic exposure conditions are now presumptive?

The VA added more than 20 burn pit and other toxic exposure presumptive conditions based on the PACT Act. This change expands benefits for Gulf War era and post-9/11 Veterans.

These cancers are now presumptive:

- Brain cancer
- Gastrointestinal cancer of any type
- Glioblastoma
- Head cancer of any type
- Kidney cancer
- Lymphatic cancer of any type
- Lymphoma of any type
- Melanoma
- Neck cancer of any type
- Pancreatic cancer
- Reproductive cancer of any type
- Respiratory (breathing-related) cancer of any type

These illnesses are now presumptive:

- Asthma that was diagnosed after service
- Chronic bronchitis
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Chronic rhinitis
- Chronic sinusitis
- Constrictive bronchiolitis or obliterative bronchiolitis
- Emphysema
- Granulomatous disease
- Interstitial lung disease (ILD)
- Pleuritis
- Pulmonary fibrosis
- Sarcoidosis

How do I know if I have a presumptive exposure to burn pits?

If you served in any of these locations and time periods, the VA determined that you had exposure to burn pits or other toxins. This is called having a presumption of exposure.

On or after September 11, 2001, in any of these locations:

- Afghanistan
- Djibouti
- Egypt
- Jordan
- Lebanon
- Syria
- Uzbekistan
- Yemen
- The airspace above any of these locations

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On or after August 2, 1990, in any of these locations:

- Bahrain
- Iraq
- Kuwait
- Oman
- Qatar
- Saudi Arabia
- Somalia
- The United Arab Emirates (UAE)
- The airspace above any of these locations

Are there more exposure-related presumptive conditions?

Yes. The PACT Act adds new presumptive conditions. But there are also many other health conditions that are presumed caused by exposure to toxic (or hazardous) materials. If you have any of these other conditions, you may be eligible for health care or benefits.

Learn about other presumptive conditions based on exposure to hazardous materials at: <https://www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/hazardous-materials-exposure/>

Am I eligible for free VA health care as a post-9/11 combat Veteran?

The VA is extending and expanding VA health care eligibility based on the PACT Act. **We encourage you to apply, no matter your separation date.** Your eligibility depends on your service history and other factors.

If you meet the requirements listed here, you can get free VA health care for any condition related to your service for up to 10 years from the date of your most recent discharge or separation. You can also enroll at any time during this period and get any care you need, but you may owe a copay for some care.

At least one of these must be true of your active-duty service:

You served in a theater of combat operations during a period of war after the Persian Gulf War, **or**
You served in combat against a hostile force during a period of hostilities after November 11, 1998

And this must be true for you:

You were discharged or released on or after October 1, 2013

The VA encourages you to enroll now so they can provide any care you may need now or in the future. Enrollment is free.

What if I was discharged or released before October 1, 2013?

If you meet the requirements listed here, you can receive care and enroll during a special enrollment period between **October 1, 2022, and October 1, 2023.**

At least one of these must be true of your active-duty service:

- You served in a theater of combat operations during a period of war after the Persian Gulf War, **or**
- You served in combat against a hostile force during a period of hostilities after November 11, 1998

And both of these must be true for you:

- You were discharged or released between September 11, 2001, and October 1, 2013, **and**
- You haven't enrolled in VA health care before

The VA encourages you to apply during this 1-year period so they can provide you with any care you may need now or in the future. Enrollment is free. And your care may be free as well.

Vietnam era Veteran eligibility

What new Agent Orange presumptive conditions will VA add?

Based on the PACT Act, the VA added 2 new Agent Orange presumptive conditions:

- High blood pressure (also called hypertension)
- Monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance (MGUS)

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You may also be eligible for disability compensation based on other Agent Orange presumptive conditions. These conditions include certain cancers, type 2 diabetes, and other illnesses.

Get a list of other Agent Orange presumptive conditions at: <https://www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/hazardous-materials-exposure/agent-orange/#requirements-for-agent-orange->

If you think you're eligible for VA health care and benefits, we encourage you to apply now.

Are there more exposure-related presumptive conditions?

Yes. The PACT Act adds new presumptive conditions. But there are also many other health conditions that are presumed caused by exposure to toxic (or hazardous) materials. If you have any of these other conditions, you may be eligible for health care or benefits.

Learn about other presumptive conditions based on exposure to hazardous materials at: <https://www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/hazardous-materials-exposure/>

What new Agent Orange presumptive locations will VA add?

DVA added these 5 new locations to the list of presumptive locations:

- Any U.S. or Royal Thai military base in Thailand from January 9, 1962, through June 30, 1976
- Laos from December 1, 1965, through September 30, 1969
- Cambodia at Mimot or Krek, Kampong Cham Province from April 16, 1969, through April 30, 1969
- Guam or American Samoa or in the territorial waters off of Guam or American Samoa from January 9, 1962, thru July 31, 1980
- Johnston Atoll or on a ship that called at Johnston Atoll from January 1, 1972, through September 30, 1977

If you served on active duty in any of these locations, the VA will automatically assume (or “presume”) that you had exposure to Agent Orange.

What new radiation presumptive locations will VA add?

The VA added these 3 new response efforts to the list of presumptive locations:

- Cleanup of **Enewetak Atoll**, from January 1, 1977, through December 31, 1980
- Cleanup of the Air Force B-52 bomber carrying nuclear weapons off the coast of **Palomares, Spain**, from January 17, 1966, through March 31, 1967
- Response to the fire onboard an Air Force B-52 bomber carrying nuclear weapons near **Thule Air Force Base in Greenland** from January 21, 1968, to September 25, 1968

If you took part in any of these efforts, the VA will automatically assume (or “presume”) that you had exposure to radiation.

There are also other locations where the VA will presume that you had exposure to radiation. If you served in any of these locations, you may be eligible for health care or benefits.

Get a list of other radiation presumptive locations at: <https://www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/hazardous-materials-exposure/agent-orange/#requirements-for-agent-orange->

Am I eligible for VA health care as a Vietnam Veteran?

If you served on active duty in any of these locations during these time periods, you're now eligible to apply for VA health care:

- **The Republic of Vietnam** between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975
- **Thailand at any U.S. or Royal Thai base** between January 9, 1962, and June 30, 1976
- **Laos** between December 1, 1965, and September 30, 1969
- **Certain provinces in Cambodia** between April 16, 1969, and April 30, 1969
- **Guam or American Samoa (or their territorial waters)** between January 9, 1962, and July 31, 1980
- **Johnston Atoll (or on a ship that called at Johnston Atoll)** between January 1, 1972, and September 30, 1977