

Burn Pits

The VFW's Concerns:

The use of open air burn pits in combat zones has caused invisible, but grave health complications for our nation's service members, past and present. Particulate matter, dioxins — the destructive compound found in Agent Orange — and other harmful materials are all present in burn pits and other environmental hazards throughout Iraq and Afghanistan. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) maintains the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry to study and inform registrants of the health conditions associated with exposure to burn pits. A National Academy of Medicine (NAM) report confirmed concerns from registered veterans who say the registry is ineffective and must be improved.

The NAM report on the VA Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry also noted a connection between burn pit exposure and numerous health conditions including emphysema, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and asthma. A peer-reviewed study entitled, "New-onset Asthma Among Soldiers Serving in Iraq and Afghanistan," also found a connection between deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan and asthma among deployed veterans. Other studies have shown similar evidence of association between pulmonary conditions and exposure to toxic burn pits. Additional research may be needed, but veterans who suffer from these pulmonary conditions should not be left to suffer without VA health care or benefits.

Burn pit exposure is also impacting the health of men and women currently serving, so it is important for the Department of Defense (DOD) to track exposures and conditions prevalent among service members who have deployed to areas where burn pits have been used. DOD has not effectively tracked the location where burn pits were used, types of materials burned, data collected by industrial hygienists regarding exposures, data collected from post-deployment health assessments, or medical retirements caused by health conditions related to burn pit exposures. DOD must also share such information with VA.

Additionally, the National Academy of Medicine report entitled, "Gulf War and Health, Volume 11: Generational Health Effects of Service in the Gulf War," concluded that certain birth defects and reproductive issues may be associated with exposure to toxic substances and illnesses that are prevalent in Iraq and Afghanistan, but more coordinated research is needed to determine the long-term health effects of burn pit exposure.

The VFW urges Congress to:

- Pass legislation requiring VA to make much needed improvements to the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry.
- Provide veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan the care and benefits they need to cope with pulmonary health conditions that are associated with their exposure to burn pits.
- Pass H.R. 663 or S. 191, *Burn Pits Accountability Act*, which would improve how DOD tracks, treats, and prevents the harmful impact of burn pits.
- Establish and properly fund independent research on the impact of burn pits on exposed veterans and their descendants through the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP).