



DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS

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Service Bulletin

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DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)

<http://www.va.gov>

VA Publishes Final Regulation to Aid Veterans Exposed to Agent Orange in Korea

<http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/diseases.asp>

Veterans exposed to herbicides while serving along the demilitarized zone (DMZ) in Korea will have an easier path to access quality health care and benefits under a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) final regulation that will expand the dates when illnesses caused by herbicide exposure can be presumed to be related to Agent Orange.

Under the final regulation published January 25, 2011 in the *Federal Register*, VA will presume herbicide exposure for any veteran who served between April 1, 1968, and Aug. 31, 1971, in a unit determined by VA and the Department of Defense to have operated in an area in or near the Korean DMZ in which herbicides were applied. Previously, VA recognized that Agent Orange exposure could only be conceded to Veterans who served in certain units along the Korean DMZ between April 1968 and July 1969.

In practical terms, eligible veterans who have specific illnesses VA presumes to be associated with herbicide exposure do not have to prove an association between their illness and their military service. This “presumption” simplifies and speeds up the application process for benefits and ensures that veterans receive the benefits they deserve.

Veterans with covered service in Korea who have medical conditions that may be related to Agent Orange are encouraged to contact the nearest [DAV National Service Office](#) to submit their applications for access to VA health care and compensation.

New and Enhanced VA Benefits Provided to Caregivers of Veterans

www.caregiver.va.gov

VA is providing the first of a series of new and enhanced services supporting family caregivers of seriously ill and injured Veterans. In May 2010, President Obama signed the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010 legislation authorizing VA to establish a wide range of new services to support certain caregivers of eligible Post 9/11 Veterans.

In addition to the new benefits and services for eligible veterans who were disabled in the line of duty since Sept. 11, 2001 (Post 9/11 Veterans), VA will also begin providing enhanced benefits and services to caregivers of veterans of all eras who are already enrolled in VA care, including:

- Access to VA's toll-free Caregiver Support Line: 1-855-260-3274,
- Expanded education and training on caring for Veterans at home,
- Other support services such as counseling and support groups and referral services; and
- An enhanced website for caregivers.

Some of the new benefits of the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act are restricted by law to the caregivers of the most seriously ill and injured Post 9/11 veterans. Those additional benefits include a monthly stipend; health care coverage; travel expenses, including lodging and per diem while accompanying veterans undergoing care; respite care; and mental health services and counseling. VA will report to Congress in the future on the feasibility of expanding the enhanced services to family caregivers of veterans of all eras.

While some of the enhanced benefits are available now, many of the other significant newly-enacted benefits will require the issuance of regulations. These additional benefits include monthly stipends, pay for travel costs, medical coverage, training, counseling and respite care designed to prevent institutionalization of veterans whenever possible. The law requires regulations for determining eligibility, designating and approving caregivers, and providing stipends and health care coverage to primary family caregivers. The process required to implement these regulations will provide veterans, caregivers and the general public the opportunity to provide comments before those regulations are finalized.

Each VA medical center has designated caregiver support coordinators who will assist eligible veterans and caregivers in understanding and applying for the new benefits. VA also has a Caregiver Support Web page, www.caregiver.va.gov, which will provide general information once final regulations are published.

VA Support Line and Web Site Provide Assistance to Caregivers

www.caregiver.va.gov

VA's National Caregiver Support Line -- 1-855-260-3274 -- will serve as the primary resource and referral center to assist caregivers, veterans and others seeking caregiver information. The line unofficially started Feb. 1, 2011 and in its first week logged nearly 600 calls, including 134 referrals to local VA caregiver support coordinators and 233 calls from caregivers themselves. The support line provides information regarding new caregiver benefits, referrals to local caregiver support coordinators as well as emotional support to those concerned with their ability to provide care to loved ones who are veterans.

The National Caregiver Support Line will be open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 11 p.m., ET; and Saturday, 10:30 a.m. to 6 p.m., ET. Licensed VA social workers and health technicians will staff the support line. Local caregiver support coordinators are available to assist veterans and their caregivers to understand and apply for VA's caregiver benefits. VA also features a Web page, www.caregiver.va.gov, with general information on other caregiver support programs available through VA and the community.

Automation of Educational Benefits under Post-9/11 GI Bill

www.gibill.va.gov

A new automated system is delivering faster, more accurate payments to veterans attending school under the Post-9/11 GI Bill. The technology relies upon information from veterans and specialized rules-based software to streamline the process for calculating benefits.

The new processes and software available to VA's claims personnel replace the interim tools in use since August 2009, when the Post 9/11 GI Bill became effective. VA has issued more than \$8 billion in Post-9/11 GI Bill benefit payments to nearly 440,000 students and their educational institutions.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill pays schools directly for the tuition and fees incurred by eligible veterans and active-duty personnel. Those payments are based upon the maximum rate in each state for tuition and fees at the in-state level for undergraduates. A monthly housing allowance is also provided. Also included is a maximum \$1,000 annual stipend for books and supplies, and a one-time payment of \$500 for students who reside in specific rural areas.

U.S. Social Security Administration (SSA)

www.ssa.gov

Social Security Disability Benefits for Wounded Warriors

<http://www.ssa.gov/woundedwarriors/>

Military service members can receive expedited processing of disability claims from Social Security. Benefits available through Social Security are different than those from the Department of Veterans Affairs and require a separate application. The expedited process is used for military service members who become disabled while on active military service on or after October 1, 2001, regardless of where the disability occurs.

In order to receive SSA disability benefits, a claimant cannot engage in substantial work activity for pay or profit, also known as substantial gainful activity. Active duty status and receipt of military pay does not, in itself, necessarily prevent payment of disability benefits. Receipt of military payments should not stop military personnel from applying for disability benefits from Social Security. If a service member is receiving treatment at a military medical facility and working in a designated therapy program or on limited duty, SSA will evaluate the work activity to determine eligibility for benefits. The actual work activity is the controlling factor and not the amount of pay received or the person's military duty status.

For additional information see the publication *Disability Benefits for Wounded Warriors* available at the SSA Wounded Warriors Web site: <http://www.ssa.gov/pubs/10030.pdf>.

Department of Defense (DoD)

<http://www.vietnamwar50th.com/>

DoD Announces Vietnam War 50th Anniversary Commemoration Program

The Department of Defense has announced a program to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War. The program will:

- Thank and honor veterans of the Vietnam War, including personnel who were held as prisoners of war or listed as missing in action, for their service and sacrifice on behalf of the United States and to thank and honor the families of these veterans.
- Highlight the service of the armed forces during the Vietnam War and the contributions of federal agencies and governmental and non-governmental organizations that served with, or in support of, the armed forces.
- Pay tribute to the contributions made on the home front by the people of the United States during the Vietnam War.

- Highlight the advances in technology, science, and medicine related to the military research conducted during the Vietnam War.
- Recognize the contributions and sacrifices made by the allies of the United States during the Vietnam War.

DoD representatives will coordinate with other federal agencies, veteran groups, state, local government and non-government organizations for their input in Vietnam War commemoration activities. For more information call 877-387-9951 or visit the official website at <http://www.vietnamwar50th.com/>.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Garry J. Augustine". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath it.

GARRY J. AUGUSTINE
National Service Director