



DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS

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# Service Bulletin

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## **DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)**

<http://www.va.gov/>

### **VA Continues Long-Term Study on Gulf War Era Veterans**

<http://www.publichealth.va.gov/epidemiology/studies/gulf-war-follow-up.asp>

For the third time since the 1990-1991 Gulf War, VA researchers will contact Gulf War-era veterans as a part of a long-term study of their health. For the “Follow-up Study of a National Cohort of Gulf War and Gulf Era Veterans,” researchers want to learn about how the health of these Veterans has changed over time, and about the natural history of long-term conditions like unexplained multi-symptom illnesses. Researchers began contacting participants at the end of May 2012. Veterans were previously contacted for a baseline survey in 1995 and a follow-up survey in 2005.

More than a dozen scientific articles have been published from the two earlier surveys in the study. This work has investigated multi-symptom illnesses, chronic diseases, and environmental exposures associated with military deployment. For example, a recent scientific article showed that Gulf War veterans’ health has worsened over time compared to the health of Gulf War Era veterans who served elsewhere. Gulf War veterans reported higher rates of ongoing unexplained multi-symptom illness, post-traumatic stress disorder, and chronic fatigue syndrome-like illness, along with higher health care utilization, including frequent clinic visits and recurrent hospitalization. These findings, other ongoing studies, and future research efforts will help VA to better understand the health consequences of deployment and guide care delivery.

### **Veteran Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP) Update**

<https://www.ebenefits.va.gov>

VRAP, a program to give skills training to some unemployed veterans has garnered over 12,000 online applications, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs. The program allows qualifying veterans between the ages of 35 and 60 to receive up to 12 months of education assistance. Maximum payments are equal to the full-time rate for the Montgomery GI Bill – Active Duty, currently \$1,473 monthly.

Under VRAP, veterans apply on a first-come, first-served basis for programs that begin on or after July 1. VA began accepting applications on May 15. Forty-five thousand veterans can participate during the current fiscal year, and up to 54,000 may participate during the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1, 2012. The goal of the program is to train 99,000 veterans for high-demand jobs over the next two years.

To qualify veterans must:

- Be 35 to 60 years old, unemployed on the day of application, and have been issued discharges under conditions other than dishonorable;
- Be enrolled in education or training after July 1, 2012, in a VA-approved program of education offered by a community college or technical school leading to an associate degree, non-college degree or a certificate for a high-demand occupation as defined by the Department of Labor;
- Not be eligible for any other VA education benefit, such as the Post-9/11 GI Bill, the Montgomery GI Bill, or Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment;
- Not have participated in a federal or state job training program within the last 180 days; and
- Not receive VA compensation at the 100 percent rate due to individual unemployability.

For more information on the Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) program, the Hire Heroes Act of 2011, VRAP, high demand occupations, and application procedures, visit the website at [www.benefits.va.gov/VOW](http://www.benefits.va.gov/VOW), or call VA National Call Center toll free at 1-800-827-1000. Veterans may also access the VRAP application online at <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov> through eBenefits, a joint project between VA and the Department of Defense.

### **Processing of Retroactive Agent Orange Claims Nearly Complete**

VA recently announced that nearly 230,000 claims have been processed for the three newest Agent-Orange related conditions through June 2012, including over 150,000 claims required to be adjudicated under the order of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California in *Nehmer v. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*. The near completion of the *Nehmer* claims will enable VA to redirect 1,200 employees who were dedicated to reviewing the Agent Orange cases toward addressing the current backlog of disability claims.

The Agent Orange claims stemmed from VA's 2010 amendment of its regulations to add ischemic heart disease, hairy cell and other chronic B-cell leukemias, and Parkinson's disease to the list of diseases presumed to be related to exposure to the herbicide used in Southeast Asia.

VA has established a website, [www.fastrack.va.gov](http://www.fastrack.va.gov), to assist veterans in filing claims for the three new conditions related to the effects of Agent Orange exposure. Potentially eligible veterans include those who were exposed based on duty or visitation in Vietnam

or on its inland waterways between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975; exposed along the demilitarized zone in Korea between April 1, 1968, and August 31, 1971; or exposed due to herbicide tests and storage at military bases within and outside of the United States.

### **DAV National Service Department Program Updates**

- DSO/CSO Certification Program:
  - Total number of certifications and re-certifications YTD in 2012: 501
  - Total number of Departments involved: 10
- Transition Service Program (TSP):
  - Total number of 2012 TSP participants YTD: 26,238
  - Applications filed: 7,440
- Mobile Service Office (MSO) Program:
  - Total number of claims filed: 4,468
  - Total number of Powers of Attorney executed: 1,663
  - Total number of interviews: 5,662
  - Total memberships: 125
  - Total miles driven: 30,587
- Service Seminar Program:
  - Total number of 2012 Service Seminars: 14
  - Total number of persons attending: 1,681
  - Total number of interviews: 367
  - Total number of claims filed: 136
  - Total number of new members: 43



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