

VA Clears Final Hurdle for New Agent Orange Presumptive Claims

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WASHINGTON — The new national commander of the 2.1 million-member Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. and its Auxiliaries is saluting the Department of Veterans Affairs for making it easier for Vietnam veterans suffering from illnesses related to Agent Orange exposure to receive the healthcare and benefits they earned and deserve. Today's publishing of a final regulation in the Federal Register could see disability checks being issued for three new illnesses by the end of October.

"This move by the VA is very significant for Vietnam veterans," said Richard L. Eubank, a Vietnam veteran and retired Marine from Eugene, Ore., who last Thursday was elected to lead America's largest combat veterans' organization. "Scientific research is validating what the veterans' community has been saying for decades — that Agent Orange exposure made people sick. By accepting those findings, the VA is telling veterans that 'We believe you,' which is exactly the level of trust that we want."

On July 24, 2009, the Institute of Medicine released an independent report entitled "Veterans and Agent Orange," that links hairy cell leukemia, Parkinson's disease and ischemic heart disease to exposure to Agent Orange and other herbicide defoliant s used during the war. Less than three months later, VA Secretary Eric Shinseki added the three to the list of presumptive illnesses, bringing the total to 15.

"By accepting the IOM recommendations, Secretary Shinseki is proving that he will listen to the scientific community and act on their recommendations if it helps to better serve veterans and their families," said Eubank. "America's veterans are extremely fortunate to have him in our corner."

The list of 15 illnesses now recognized under VA's "presumption" rule are:

- * Acute and Subacute Transient Peripheral Neuropathy
- * AL Amyloidosis
- * Chloracne
- * Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia
- * Diabetes Mellitus (Type 2)

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- * Hairy Cell Leukemia
- * Hodgkin's Disease
- * Ischemic Heart Disease
- * Multiple Myeloma
- * Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma
- * Parkinson's Disease
- * Porphyria Cutanea Tarda
- * Prostate Cancer
- * Respiratory Cancers
- * Soft Tissue Sarcoma (other than Osteosarcoma, Chondrosarcoma, Kaposi's sarcoma, or Mesothelioma)

To read the the Oct. 13, 2009, VA press release with links to more information on each illness, go to <http://www1.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=1796>.