



IONIZING RADIATION REVIEW

Vol. 1, No. 1 *Information for Veterans Exposed To Ionizing Radiation* February 2004

Introducing VA’s New Newsletter On Ionizing Radiation – The Inaugural Issue

Several months ago, we received a letter from the National Association of Atomic Veterans (NAAV), suggesting that we consider the preparation of an atomic veterans newsletter similar to the newsletter we have produced for more than 2 decades for Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange or other herbicides used in Vietnam during active duty military service. (In addition, VA has released 34 issues of the Gulf War Review; originally known as the Persian Gulf Review, which was founded 10 years after the Agent Orange Review).

Forty issues of the Agent Orange newsletter have been published since it began in late 1982. NAAV leaders pointed out that there were many VA programs that would be of tremendous interest to veterans exposed to ionizing radiation during their military service.

We agreed. Here it is. Thanks to members of the NAAV for the good suggestions and the ideas for this first issue. We hope all interested veterans find it helpful and informative. All of us at VA appreciate this opportunity to better serve this deserving group of veterans.

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Remarks From the Secretary



Anthony J. Principi
VA Secretary

America’s veterans accepted the risks of military duty and some have borne the burden of illnesses contracted during their service to our nation. They should not have to bear an undue burden prove they deserve the benefits they have so rightfully earned. Unfortunately, too many veterans exposed to ionizing radiation in the military

have found it difficult to receive benefits for – and information about – their health problems.

This newsletter is one tool the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is using to bridge this information gap and reach out to veterans whose health may have been adversely affected by exposure to ionizing radiation during their military service.

Like any bridge, communication works best when it goes both ways. We encourage and welcome your questions, suggestions and feedback to improve our service to veterans.

Whether highlighting research into radiation-related diseases, announcing additions to the list of presumptive illnesses or updating efforts to review claims using improved dosage estimates, I expect this newsletter to serve as a useful resource for health information, scientific inquiry, legislative initiative and policy changes affecting the services and benefits our veterans have earned by their service to the Nation.

VA’s Comprehensive Program on Ionizing Radiation – Health Care and Other Benefits

The World’s first atomic bombs were conceived and constructed during the Manhattan Project, tested in July 1945 at Alamogordo, NM, and then dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki the following month. U.S. atmospheric nuclear weapons testing concluded more than 40 years ago.

Despite this “ancient history,” many veterans who were present during the construction and later testing, and those serving in the occupation of Japan, continue to seek treatment for ionizing radiation-caused health problems for themselves or their families. Family members understandingly have related concerns. Other veterans were exposed to ionizing radiation such as submariners



or as Gulf War participants who came in contact with depleted uranium (DU), and they and their families also have concerns.

Over the years, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), previously known as the Veterans Administration, has developed comprehensive programs to respond to the needs of veterans exposed to ionizing radiation. VA provides special health care services to certain veterans who were exposed to radiation while on active duty. These veterans can receive our Ionizing Radiation Registry Health examination (see article starting on this page) and medical treatment for conditions related to their exposure. They are also eligible for the wide range of benefits offered by VA to most veterans, including home loan guarantees, educational payments, and, under certain circumstances, disability compensation. (See article on pages 4-5).

To qualify for VA's program for veterans exposed to ionizing radiation, individuals must meet specific criteria. By law and VA regulations, eligible veterans include those who:

- Participated in atmospheric nuclear weapons testing;
- Participated in American occupation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan;
- In some cases, were held as prisoners of War in Japan;
- In some cases, served at gaseous diffusion plants in Paducah, KY, Portsmouth, OH, or area K25 at Oak Ridge, TN (See page 3 for more details); or
- Participated in certain underground nuclear weapons tests in Alaska.

Individuals in the first three groups are sometimes referred to as "Atomic Veterans."

Veterans who received nasopharyngeal (NP) radium treatments during their military service are also eligible to participate in VA's Ionizing Radiation Registry examination program.

More than 400,000 service members participated in these activities, including about 210,000 individuals who participated in atmospheric nuclear tests between 1945 and 1962, and an estimated 195,000 service members who participated in post-World War II occupations. The numbers for the other exposures are smaller.

What Is Ionizing Radiation?



The term "ionizing radiation" (IR) refers to radiation emitted by a group of subatomic particles and electromagnetic waves or photons that have enough energy to break chemical bonds and create ions (electrically charged particles) when they interact with atoms or molecules such as in the human body, causing short- and long-term health consequences. The following are types of ionizing radiation:

- Radiation emitted from alpha particles. These are relatively larger, and are made of parts of the nuclei of atoms. They are not able to penetrate the intact skin. Therefore, alpha emitters are hazardous primarily if they are taken into the body (for example, via the mouth and nose) and function as sources of internal radiation.
- Radiation emitted from beta particles which are high energy electrons that also come from atomic nuclei. They can penetrate a short distance into the body, but are hazardous primarily if they are taken into the body and function as sources of internal radiation.
- Gamma rays and similar x rays are types of electromagnetic waves. These rays can penetrate the body readily, both external and internal gamma sources are hazardous.

VA Ionizing Radiation Registry: More Than 23,000 Veterans Participate and Others Eligible for This Program are Welcome

More than 23,000 veterans who participated in radiation-risk activities during their military service have voluntarily completed the VA Ionizing Radiation Registry health examination. This is about five percent of those eligible for such an examination. The exam is free of charge and available, at nearly all VA medical centers. For more information, go online to www.va.gov/irad.

(Continued on page 3)

About the “Ionizing Radiation Review”

The “Ionizing Radiation Review” is written by VA’s Environmental Agents Service to provide information to former military service members who may have been exposed to ionizing radiation during their military service. The “Review” describes the possible long-term health consequences of such exposure and VA’s program to respond to these health risks.

The newsletter is intended to help provide information to veterans and their families concerned about the health risks of exposure to ionizing radiation in military service.

This is the first issue of the “Ionizing Radiation Review” newsletter. We anticipate publication once or twice annually, depending on the amount of news on this subject, budgetary considerations, and interest. This newsletter was drafted in late January 2004, and does not include developments that occurred after that time.

Questions, comments, and suggestions for future issues are encouraged and can be sent to the editor of the Ionizing Radiation Review, Donald J. Rosenblum, Deputy Director, Environmental Agents Service (131), VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20420.

Requests for additional copies of the newsletter should also be sent to Mr. Rosenblum. Supplies are limited. Please specify the quantity and issue date requested.

The “Review” will be posted on the Internet at www.va.gov/irad.

VA Ionizing Radiation Registry: More Than 23,000 Veterans Participate and Others are Welcome *(Continued from page 2)*

Under this program, VA Environmental Health Clinicians conduct a comprehensive physical examination. Participating veterans are given the following baseline laboratory studies: a complete blood count, blood chemistries, enzyme studies, and urinalysis, as well as a chest x ray if medically necessary.

Appropriate additional diagnostic studies are performed and consultations obtained as indicated by the patient’s symptoms and physical and laboratory findings. Nonroutine diagnostic studies, such as computed tomography (CT) or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), are performed if medically indicated. The laboratory test results are filed in the veteran’s permanent record, maintained by the VA medical system.

In gathering each veteran’s medical history data, the doctor records the time of onset of symptoms or conditions, the intensity of symptoms or conditions, the degree of physical incapacitation, and details of any treatment received.

When performing the examination, the doctor pays special attention to the various conditions and diagnoses that VA has recognized, by law or regulation, as being associated with radiation exposure. Following the examination, the VA Environmental Health Clinician is responsible for personally discussing with each veteran the findings of the physical examination and completed diagnostic studies. In addition, each veteran will receive a followup letter explaining these findings and advising him or her of future actions.

VA maintains similar registry programs for Gulf War veterans and for veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange in Vietnam or elsewhere.

VA Revises Ionizing Radiation Registry Handbook

On October 21, 2003, VA’s Office of the Under Secretary for Health formally approved the revised Veterans Health Administration (VHA) handbook entitled “Ionizing Radiation Registry (IRR) Program Procedures.” The revised handbook establishes new procedures for VA, VHA, and Environmental Agents Service (EAS) with regards to ionizing radiation. The revised handbook clarifies changes to the program made by Public Laws 104-262 and 105-368.

The major changes to the VHA handbook are summarized below:

The revised handbook reorganizes and clarifies the eligibility of additional categories of veterans requesting the Ionizing Radiation Registry examinations at VA facilities. These include those individuals who participated in the following radiation-risk activities at the

- (1) Department of Energy gaseous diffusion plants at Paducah, KY, Portsmouth, OH, or the K25 area at Oak Ridge, TN, at least 250 days before February 1, 1992, or
- (2) Underground nuclear tests at Amchitka Island, AK, before January 1, 1974.

The revised handbook also implements the new electronic method of transmitting registry data to the Austin Automation Center, which replaces the manual process in affect since the registry was established.

The handbook can be seen on the Web at: www.va.gov/irad.

Two VA Disability Compensation Programs for Radiation-Exposed Veterans

VA provides monthly payments – known as disability compensation – to radiation-exposed veterans who suffer disabling radiation-related diseases, under the following two programs:

1. Presumptive Compensation

Several categories of veterans are automatically eligible for compensation for one or more of 21 cancers specified in Federal law and presumed to be associated with radiation exposure. These categories are: Veterans who participated in atmospheric nuclear tests by the U.S., as well as certain underground tests at Amchitka Island, Alaska, prior to January 1, 1974, who served with the U.S. occupation forces in Hiroshima or Nagasaki, Japan, between August 1945 and July 1946, who were prisoners of war in Japan, or some who served at the gaseous diffusion plants in Paducah, KY, Portsmouth, OH, and area K25 at Oak Ridge, TN.

These 21 cancers presumed to be service-connected for veterans who participated in “radiation-risk activities,” a term defined by VA regulations, include all forms of leukemia (except for chronic lymphocytic leukemia); cancer of the thyroid, breast, pharynx, esophagus, stomach, small intestine, pancreas, bile ducts, gall bladder, salivary gland, urinary tract (renal pelvis, urethra, urinary bladder, and urethra), brain, bone, lung, colon, and ovary, bronchiolo-alveolar carcinoma, multiple myeloma, lymphomas (other than Hodgkin’s disease); and primary liver cancer (except if cirrhosis or hepatitis B is indicated).

2. Nonpresumptive Compensation

Radiation-exposed veterans with exposure situations or conditions other than mentioned above may be eligible for compensation. VA adjudicators consider a number of factors, including the amount and duration of exposure, the relative sensitivity of exposed tissue, and other factors.

VA regulations define all cancers as possibly caused by radiation. Other non-malignant conditions might be caused by radiation. These conditions include, posterior subcapsular cataracts; non-malignant thyroid nodular disease; parathyroid adenoma; and tumors of the brain and central nervous system.

Surviving family members of deceased veterans who had radiogenic diseases may be eligible for monthly payments known as dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC). When the evidence in favor of service-connection is equal to the evidence against such a relationship, VA policy require that the adjudicator find in the claimant’s favor.

Compensation Amounts

The amount of money provided in the monthly payments depends on the degree of disability (and loss of the ability to work). The degrees range from 0 to 100 percent. They are expressed in 10 percent rating increments. A veteran with a 80 percent rating would receive considerably more than one with a 50 percent rating and much less than a veterans with a 100 percent rating. Compensation rates change frequently, and are set by Congress. The monthly rate in 2004 for a 50 percent disability rating was \$646; for 80 percent, \$1,195, and for 100 percent, \$2,239.

The amount received by the surviving spouse eligible for DIC depends on the date of the veteran’s death. For veterans who died before January 1, 1993, the spouse is entitled to a monthly amount based on the deceased veteran’s pay grade when leaving military service. In 2004, the amount ranges from \$967 for E-1 to \$2,213 for O-10.

In 2004, the monthly DIC basic rate for the spouses of veterans who died on or after January 1, 1993 is \$961, but increased by \$241 for each dependent child, \$241 if aid and attendance is required for the spouse, and \$115 if the spouse is housebound. The monthly amount is increased by \$208 if the deceased was totally disabled for 8 continuous years prior to death.

Claims for disability compensation or DIC may be filed at a VA regional office. The national toll-free telephone number to locate the nearest VA regional offices is **1-800-827-1000**. Veterans services representatives, located at all VA regional offices, and many VA medical facilities can assist veterans and their family members in filing. The Department of Defense (DoD) also has a toll-free number to provide veterans with information about their nuclear test participation. The DoD number is **1-800-462-3683**.

The following summary shows the evolution of VA presumptive compensation program, as it relates to radiation.

Summary of Laws and Regulations Authorizing ‘Presumptive’ Compensation

Public Law 100-321 – Enacted May 20, 1988

This law made following diseases presumptive for veterans who participated in a “radiation risk activity”:

- Leukemia other than chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL)
- Cancer of the thyroid
- Cancer of the breast
- Cancer of the pharynx
- Cancer of the esophagus
- Cancer of the stomach
- Cancer of the small intestine
- Cancer of the pancreas
- Multiple myeloma
- Lymphomas (except Hodgkin’s disease)
- Cancer of the bile ducts
- Cancer of the gall bladder
- Primary liver cancer except if cirrhosis or hepatitis B is indicated

Public Law 102-578 -- Effective October 1, 1992

This law added the following to the presumptive condition list:

- Cancers of the salivary gland
- Urinary tract cancer (kidney, renal, pelvis, ureter, urinary bladder and urethra)

Public Law 106-117 -- Effective November 30, 1999

This law added bronchiolo-alveolar cancer (a rare form of lung cancer)

Amendment to 38 Code of Federal Regulations, Section 3.309 -- Effective March 26, 2002

This regulation expanded the definition of “radiation-risk activity” and added the following cancers:

- Cancer of the bone
- Cancer of the brain
- Cancer of the colon
- Cancer of the lung
- Cancer of the ovary

VA Independent Study Guide on Ionizing Radiation Available on Web

A continuing medical education guide entitled “Veterans and Radiation,” prepared by VA’s Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards together with the VA’s Employee Education System, is now on the Web at www.va.gov/VHI. This self- study guide, intended primarily for VA health care providers, was created to keep these providers up to date on radiation-related issues. Preparation of an updated version is underway.

The radiation module is one of twelve available so far as part of the Veterans Health Initiative (VHI). The VHI program is an effort to help health care professionals understand the unique health concerns of veterans, including the health problems associated with radiation.

In addition to the radiation program, VHI series independent study guides are available on the following topics:

- Cold Injury
- Agent Orange
- Hearing Impairment
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Prisoners of War
- Gulf War
- Spinal Cord Injury
- Traumatic Amputation and Prosthetics
- Visual Impairment and Blindness
- Caring for War Wounded
- Health Effects from Chemical, Biological, and Radiological Weapons

These modules explain health issues and include photos of military activities, illustrations, bibliographies, and in some cases, moving testimonials by veterans, in addition to a review of medical management of the condition. At the end, readers can take an online test on their knowledge of the subject. All of these modules can be accessed at www.va.gov/VHI.

“Having a better understanding of how certain health problems are linked to military service and the recommended evaluation and treatment approaches for these problems will enhance care for veterans,” explains Dr. Susan Mather, VA’s Public Health and Environmental Hazards Chief Officer, whose staff is spearheading the VHI with the help of medical and education experts throughout VA. “Health care providers from VA and the Department

of Defense can earn continuing education credits for completing the modules, but all health care professionals who care for veterans will gain from reading this material," she adds.

Questions and Answers

It is anticipated that the "Review" will, from time to time, include a question and answer section in which VA officials will respond to inquiries from readers regarding exposure to radiation, problems experienced by veterans and their families possibly related to such exposure, and programs initiated by VA and other Federal departments or agencies to help these veterans and their families. We will not use the names of those who send us the questions.

Questions should be sent to Mr. Donald J. Rosenblum, Deputy Director, Environmental Agents Service (131), ATTN: Radiation Review—Q's & A's, VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20420.

We plan to include as many questions as possible in future issues, but cannot guarantee that all questions we receive will be included.

Other Publications Available

The VA's Environmental Agents Service that prepared this newsletter also is responsible for three other national newsletters: the (1) Agent Orange Review, (2) Gulf War Review, and (3) Operations Iraqi Freedom/Enduring Freedom Review. If you are interested in receiving one or more of publications, please contact Mr. Donald Rosenblum, Deputy Director, Environmental Agents Service (131), VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20420. Please specify which publication you are seeking by noting (for example, ATTN Agent Orange Review) on both the envelope and on your letter. Also please include the date (at least the year) of the publication sought.

We will answer all requests as soon as possible. Please be patient however, we have a very small staff.

Readers' Survey

The editor of this newsletter is seeking feedback on this first issue of the publication. Please take a few minutes to provide your comments, suggestions, recommendations, and advice for future issues of the newsletter.

In completing the brief questionnaire, we ask that you not critique the VA health care system, explain the difficulties you may have encountered in getting financial benefits from VA, or discuss specific personal issues.

Rather, we want your ideas regarding to the newsletter. You are welcome and even encouraged to bring those other problems to our attention in another letter. Please send your survey respond to Mr. Donald J. Rosenblum, Environmental Agents Service (131), ATTN: IRR Survey, Department of Veterans Affairs, 810 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20420. You can use this paper or write on your own.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

What do you think of the Review? _____

Does it meet your needs? Why or why not? _____

What changes would you like to see in this publication? Additions? Deletions? _____

Additional comments or suggestions? _____

For the greatest impact, please respond as soon as possible.

Where to Go For Information and Help

Veterans concerned about their exposure to radiation and its possible long-term health consequences -- nearly every VA medical center offers the VA's Ionizing Radiation Registry health examination. Veterans who were exposed to radiation during their military service and who are eligible for this program are encouraged to participate in this voluntary program. Call the nearest VA medical center for an appointment. The telephone number should be included in your local telephone directory under the "U.S. Government" listings.

VA medical centers have designated an Environmental Health Clinician and an Environmental Health Coordinator. The Clinician performs (or oversees) the registry examination; the Coordinator is responsible for handling the administrative aspects of this program.

For general information about VA health benefits and enrollment in the VA health care system, call **1-877-222-8387**. Veterans are not required to enroll in the system in order to receive the Registry examination.

Veterans who need prompt medical treatment for conditions that may be related to their exposure to radiation during military service -- contact the nearest VA medical center for eligibility information and possible medical treatment. Atomic veterans seeking care solely for health problems associated with exposure to radiation have been assigned to category six in the enrollment priorities system. Call the number above for information on this subject.

Veterans with illnesses incurred in or aggravated by exposure to radiation or some other aspect of military service -- contact a VA veterans services

representative (VSR) at the nearest VA regional offices or health care facility and apply for disability compensation. The national toll-free telephone number for information regarding VA benefits is **1-800-827-1000**. Also, VA applications are available on the internet at vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp.

Veterans who encounter difficulties at a VA medical center -- contact the Patient Advocate or Patient Representative at that facility for assistance in resolving the problem.

Representatives of various Veteran Service Organizations, including The American Legion (**1-800-433-3318**, www.legion.org), Paralyzed Veterans of America (**1-800-424-8200**, www.pva.org), Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (**1-800-VFW-1899**, www.vfw.org), Disabled American Veterans (**1-877-426-2838**, www.dav.org), National Association of Atomic Veterans (www.naav.com), and others have been very helpful to veterans exposed to radiation who are seeking disability compensation. The email address for the National Association of Atomic Veterans (NAAV) is www.naav.com. NAAV Commander William A. Harper's is pbharper@mindspring.com. His telephone number is **480-895-0676**. NAAV Vice Commander Robert M. Campbell Jr. is hotdoc0@cox.net. Mr. Campbell's telephone number is **610-596-2234**. (These organizations are cited as examples. There are many other very helpful organizations. VA does not endorse or recommend any specific group over another.)

Country and State Veteran Service Officers also have been of great help to many military veterans.

Benefits Available to Former POWs

Among the target audiences of this newsletter are former prisoners of war (POWs) held in Japan during World War II when the atomic bombs were dropped. VA is concerned that some of these veterans may be unaware of the benefits to which they are entitled.

In fact, more than 23,000 former POWs receive compensation and other services from VA based on their wartime service and incarceration by the enemy. Yet, thousands more of America's former POWs may be eligible for VA benefits but have not applied for them. They may not be aware that recent legislation may make them and their dependents eligible for VA compensation. **Nine out of 10 living former POWs are World War II veterans.** Their advanced ages mean time is running out for them to apply for benefits for which they may be eligible.

National Outreach Initiative Planned

On April 9, 2004, National Former Prisoners of War Recognition Day (the anniversary of the fall of Bataan during World War II), VA and the VA Former Prisoner of War Advisory Committee will launch a national effort to reach U.S. veterans who are former prisoners of war with the following messages:

- VA has benefits and health care programs for former prisoners of war and their dependents.
- If you are a former POW not receiving VA benefits or health care, now is the time to apply for benefits and enroll in the VA health care system.
- Recent legislation has changed benefits for former prisoners of war. Many may not be aware of the benefits for which they are eligible even if they are currently receiving compensation.

- Each VA Regional Benefits Office and VA Medical Center has a former POW coordinator on staff. VA medical centers have former POW clinical treatment teams.
- The Veterans Health Administration and Veterans Benefits Administration (the two largest agencies within VA) have joined forces in developing and implementing a training program for these coordinators that certifies them as former POW treatment team members.

VA is relying on veterans service organizations, its own employees, and the news media to get the word out this year that now is the time for former POWs to learn more about their eligibility for and access to VA benefits and services so they can apply and enroll. For many, this will be their last call.

If you or someone you know is a former POW, call toll-free **1-800-827-1000** or visit Web site: **www.vw.gov**.

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Exposed to Ionizing Radiation
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