



Ionizing Radiation Review

Information for Veterans Exposed to Ionizing Radiation and Their Families

New Brochure: Are YOU an Atomic Veteran?



The Office of Public Health, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), has published a new brochure titled “Are YOU An Atomic Veteran?”

The trifold brochure provides information to Veterans exposed to ionizing radiation during their military service.

Highlights of the brochure include:

- Presumptive service-connected conditions
- Why Veterans should get a health registry evaluation and how to schedule one
- Benefits and claims
- Information on the Veterans’ Advisory Board on Dose Reconstruction (VBDR)

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VBDR Continues Work for Atomic Veterans Plans San Antonio Meeting for March 2012

The VBDR and its Subcommittees continue to support Atomic Veterans by reviewing and recommending improvements to the dose reconstruction and claims processes, Veteran outreach, and communication programs. The VBDR’s accomplishments include:

- Expedited radiation dose assessments through continued collaboration with the Jackson Mississippi Veterans Affairs Regional Office

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Quick Look

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Update: Veterans Advisory Board on Dose Reconstruction New Chair Appointed

Charles H. Roadman II, M.D., retired U.S. Air Force Lieutenant General, and Professor at Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USUHS), assumed duties as the Chairman of the Veterans' Advisory Board on Dose Reconstruction (VBDR) in March 2011.

Dr. Roadman previously served as the Surgeon General of the U.S. Air Force (USAF), succeeding retired Vice Admiral James A. Zimble, M.D., to become the second chairman of the VBDR.

The VBDR is a Federal Advisory Board that works with the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense through the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) on issues of importance to the Nation's Atomic Veterans.

Please visit www.VBDR.org for more information.

VBDR Loses its First Chairman

Vice Admiral James A. Zimble served as the first Chairman of the VBDR from 2005 until 2011.



Vice Admiral James A. Zimble, MC, USN (Ret.) 1934-2011

Dr. Zimble was born in Philadelphia and received a Bachelor's degree from Franklin and Marshall College. He earned his Doctor of Medicine degree from the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. Dr. Zimble served as the Surgeon General of the United States Navy and as President of the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences.

He will be sorely missed by all of those he served so well.

ABOUT THE IONIZING RADIATION REVIEW

The **Ionizing Radiation Review** is produced by VA's Environmental Health Program in the Office of Public Health. The Review provides information to Veterans and their families concerned about the health risks of exposure to ionizing radiation in military service and about VA's programs to respond to these risks.

This issue was completed in March 2012, and does not include developments that occurred after that time. For past issues of the newsletter and other information, see the Web site available at www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/radiation. The newsletter is not copyrighted and issues can be downloaded and reproduced.

Questions, comments, and suggestions for future issues are encouraged and can be sent to Editor, **Ionizing Radiation Review**, Environmental Health Program (10P3A), Office of Public Health, VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW., Washington, D.C. 20420.

Free Health Registry Evaluation for Veterans Exposed to Ionizing Radiation

VA maintains a health registry program to better understand the health of Veterans exposed to ionizing radiation during military service. VA offers the evaluation to Veterans through the Ionizing Radiation Registry (IRR) program (see eligibility criteria).

The IRR health evaluation is available free of charge to all eligible Veterans. Veterans do not need to be enrolled in VA health care to be eligible. The evaluation provides Veterans with:

- A free, specialized health evaluation that may include a medical history, lab tests, or a physical exam;
- Answers to questions about environmental exposures;
- Information about health care and other VA benefits;
- The evaluation and any test results maintained in VA medical records.

If new health problems emerge after the initial evaluation, free follow-up evaluations are also available.

To schedule an evaluation, contact an environmental health (EH) coordinator at any VA medical facility. A listing of EH coordinators is available online at www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp. Information is also available through VA's telephone assistance service at **1-800-749-8387**.

Note: A registry evaluation is not the same thing as a Compensation and Benefits ("Comp and Pen") examination. It is not a claim for VA benefits, nor is it required to receive benefits.

Ionizing Radiation Registry (IRR) Eligibility Criteria

Veterans may qualify for the IRR health evaluation if they were exposed to radiation during military service in a "radiation-risk activity," defined as:

- "Atomic Veterans," an unofficial term that refers to:
 - Participation in the occupation of Hiroshima or Nagasaki from August 6, 1945 through July 1, 1946;
 - Internment as a Prisoner of War (POW) in Japan during World War II;
 - Onsite participation in a test involving the atmospheric detonation of a nuclear device, whether or not the testing nation was the United States.
- In addition, VA regulations provide that "radiation-risk activity" also refers to:
 - Service at Department of Energy gaseous diffusion plants at Paducah, KY, Portsmouth, OH, or the K25 area at Oak Ridge, TN, for at least 250 days before February 1, 1992, under certain conditions;
 - Proximity to "Longshot," "Milrow," or "Cannikin" underground nuclear tests at Amchitka Island, AK, before January 1, 1974;
 - Receipt of nasopharyngeal (NP)—nose and throat—radium irradiation treatments while in the active military, naval, or air service.

For more information about the Ionizing Radiation Registry evaluation, go to www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/radiation/registry.asp.

VBDR Announces 2012 Public Meeting

The VBDR has held 11 public meetings since its inception in 2003. Veterans' input at these meetings has helped the VBDR with its deliberations and recommendations to VA and DTRA. Veterans have testified about their illnesses and problems with DTRA dose reconstructions and VA claims decisions.

While the VBDR exists to improve the overall process (and not to assist with individual claims), representatives from local VA Regional Offices have been available at VBDR meetings to provide assistance to Veterans with the handling of their claims.

The next VBDR meeting will be held Friday, March 23 (full day) and Saturday, March 24, 2012 (half day). The first public comment portion of the meeting is Friday 4-5 p.m. Saturday's meeting is open to the public, with the second public comment session scheduled for 9:30-10:30 a.m.

Veterans' Advisory Board on Dose Reconstruction (VBDR) Spring 2012 Public Meeting

March 23-24, 2012
Riverwalk Embassy
Suites
125 E. Houston Street
San Antonio, TX
78205-1601

Tel: 210-226-9000
Fax: 210-226-9001

For more information, call
1-866-657-VBDR (8237)
or visit www.VBDR.org.

VA Benefits and Services for Aging Veterans

VA is dedicated to providing an array of high-quality benefits and services. The following are some relevant VA offerings for aging Veterans. For the most part, enrollment in the VA health care system is required. For information on VA health benefits and enrollment visit this new Web site: www.va.gov/healthbenefits.

Current figures on Veterans and aging as of September 2011

- Total number of Veterans is 22,234,242
- Total number of Veterans ages 65-84 is 7,930,882
- Total Veterans enrolled in VA system is 8,574,198
- Total enrollees ages 65-84 is 3,069,108

Preventive care and aids to support healthy aging

- Nutrition and fitness materials
- Safe driving evaluations
- Medical equipment such as sensory aids to improve functioning

Screenings, disease prevention, and treatment

- Heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes
- Colon prostate, breast, and cervical cancer
- Cholesterol, obesity, depression

- HIV and other sexually transmitted infections
- Immunizations (flu, tetanus, whooping cough, shingles, pneumonia)

VA nursing home care

VA-owned and operated nursing homes (also called VA community living centers) admit medically and mentally stable patients who require short-stay or long-stay care, who need placement for a service-connected disability, or who have a 70 percent or greater service-connected disability. All others are admitted based on available resources (income and availability).

Rehabilitation services

Available rehabilitation therapies include: physical, occupational, speech-language, exercise, recreational, and vocational. Primary care providers can make referrals for these services.

Home-based therapy

Home-based therapy is available and requires both a referral from a primary care provider and documented homebound status.

Patients must meet Medicare income guidelines for home health care and services must be provided through VA's network of hospital-based home health providers.

Domiciliary care for homeless Veterans

The Domiciliary has evolved from a "Soldiers Home" to become an active clinical rehabilitation and treatment program for homeless male and female Veterans.

State Veterans homes

State Veterans homes may provide nursing home care, assisted living, or adult day health care – one or a combination of these three services within a facility.

State Veterans homes are owned, operated, managed and paid for by the states. VA is not involved in the management of the facility, but does formally recognize and certify these facilities. Each State establishes eligibility and admission criteria for its homes.

VA and hospice care

In some cases, VA will cover expenses for hospice care. Enrollment in VA's health care system and a referral from the Veteran's primary care provider are required.

End-of-life services

VA provides comprehensive end-of-life services to eligible Veterans. Some examples include:

- Advanced directives
- Living wills
- Burial services

For additional information about VA aging benefits, go to www.va.gov/geriatrics or send an e-mail inquiry to seniors@va.gov. For additional information about other VA benefits, go to www.vba.va.gov or www.cem.va.gov or call **1-800-827-1000** to locate your nearest VA medical facility.

Connect to VA Caregiver Support

If you're a Veteran with physical or emotional needs, VA makes it easier for you to find care and support with the new **VA Caregiver Support Line (toll-free 1-855-260-3274)**. Trained professionals will tell you what assistance is available and how to access it, and can connect you to the Caregiver Support Coordinator at your nearest VA medical center. The Center's Caregiver Support Coordinator, or the social worker, will match you with services and resources specific to your medical center.

The Caregiver Support Line hours are:

Monday through Friday 8 – 11 a.m. ET and Saturday 10:30 a.m. – 6 p.m. ET.

You can also find out more about the variety of programs and services offered by VA by visiting the new comprehensive VA Caregiver Support website at **www.caregiver.va.gov**. Among the services offered to Veterans are:

- **Adult day health care (ADHC) centers:** These are safe, supervised social places to help get Veterans out of the home and participate in activities, also giving the caregiver time off to rest.
- **Home-based primary care:** This program delivers routine, professional health care services to your home when your medical problems prevent travel. Among the services are primary care and nursing, medication management, mental health care, physical rehabilitation, nutritious meal planning, and referrals to VA and community services.
- **Skilled home care:** A skilled medical professional comes to the home to care for the homebound Veteran. Services include basic nursing services and physical, occupational and speech therapy. VA purchases this care for a homebound Veteran from a licensed non-VA medical professional.
- **Homemaker and Home Health Aide Program:** This program helps the Veteran with personal care needs. Local VA medical center can arrange for a home health aide to come to the home on a regular schedule.
- **Home telehealth:** This program provides ready access to a care coordinator by using technology, such as the computer and phone, in your home. It is typically offered to individuals who live far from a VA medical center.



VA
Caregiver
Support

Contact your Caregiver Support Coordinator to discuss which telehealth programs are available from your VA medical center.

- **Home hospice care:** During the advanced stages of a terminal disease, home hospice care can offer comfort and supportive services in your own home. An interdisciplinary team of health care providers and volunteers from a local community hospice agency provide the services 24/7. Bereavement counseling is also available.

- **Caregiver education and training programs:** VA provides training opportunities for caregivers of Veterans that include pre-discharge care instruction and specialized caregiver programs, such as polytrauma and traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury, and blind rehabilitation.



HEALTH CONDITIONS RECOGNIZED FOR PRESUMPTIVE SERVICE-CONNECTION

The following conditions occurring in certain Veterans exposed to radiation during their military service have been recognized by VA for presumptive service-connection. These are the Veterans described in the box on page 3, except for Veterans who received nasopharyngeal (NP) radium while in service, as these Veterans are eligible for different benefits. Presumptive service-connection means that Veterans with certain types of exposure to ionizing radiation who have one or more of the illnesses listed below are eligible for disability compensation from VA. They do not have to prove that their condition was caused by ionizing radiation to be eligible for disability compensation from VA.

- Leukemia other than chronic lymphocyte leukemia
- 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
- Cancers of the salivary gland
- Urinary tract cancer (kidney/renal, pelvis, ureter, urinary bladder, and urethra)
- Bronchiolo-alveolar cancer (a rare form of lung cancer)
- Cancer of the bone
- Cancer of the brain
- Cancer of the colon
- Cancer of the lung
- Cancer of the ovary

Note: To be considered for disability compensation, a Veteran must specifically apply for that benefit. Also, participation in the Ionizing Radiation Registry does not constitute an application for compensation benefits.

Disability Compensation from VA

Veterans with service-connected illnesses or injuries may be eligible for monthly payments, called disability compensation. The disability must have been incurred or aggravated during active military service. Furthermore, the military service of the Veteran must have been terminated through separation or discharge under conditions that were other than dishonorable.

Disability compensation varies according to the degree of disability and the number of dependents. Benefits are not subject to Federal or state income tax. Receipt of military retirement pay, disability severance pay, and separation incentive payments, known as SSB and VSI (Special Separation Benefits and Voluntary Separation Incentives), may affect the amount of VA compensation paid.

Disability ratings range from 0 to 100 percent (in increments of 10 percent). For example, in 2012, a Veteran with a disability rating of 10 percent receives \$127 per month; a Veteran with disability rating of 50 percent gets \$797 per month; and a Veteran with no dependents who is totally disabled and evaluated at 100 percent receives \$2,769 per month.

Veterans with disability ratings between 30 and 100 percent also may be eligible for monthly allowances for eligible dependents. (The amount depends on the disability rating).

A Veteran who is in need of regular aid and attendance of another person (including the Veteran's spouse), or

who is permanently housebound may be entitled to additional benefits. VA must make that determination before the Veteran can receive these benefits.

Veterans can apply for VA disability benefits by completing and submitting VA Form 21-526, Veterans Application for Compensation and Pension.

Please include the following materials with the application, if available:

- Discharge or separation papers (DD-214 or equivalent)
- Dependency records (marriage and children's birth certificates)
- Medical evidence (doctor and hospital reports)

Apply online through VA's Web site at vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp.

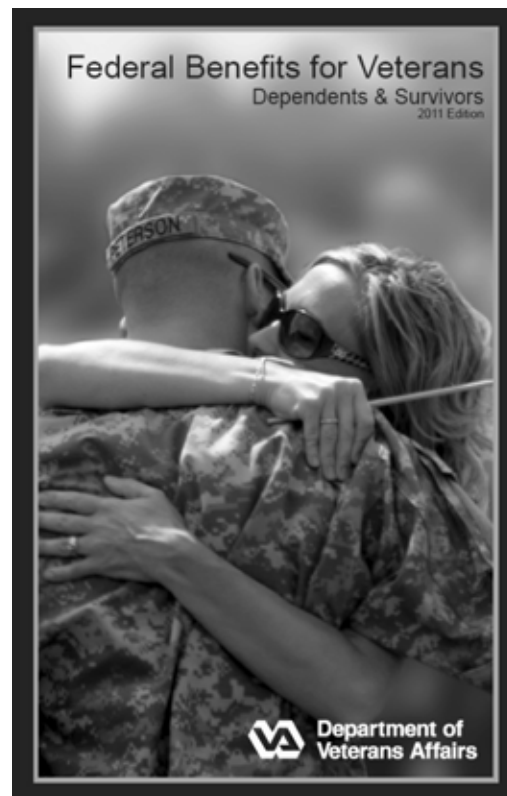
Monthly Disability Compensation Rates for 2012		
Percent Disabled	No Dependents	Veteran & Spouse
10%	\$127	—
20%	\$251	—
30%	\$389	\$435
40%	\$560	\$622
50%	\$797	\$874
60%	\$1,009	\$1,102
70%	\$1,272	\$1,380
80%	\$1,478	\$1,602
90%	\$1,661	\$1,800
100%	\$2,769	\$2,924

Annual VA Benefits Book is Available

For additional Federal benefit information, see *VA's Federal Benefits for Veterans, Dependents, and Survivors* booklet. It is updated annually to reflect changes in law and policies. The full text appears at www.va.gov/opa/publications/benefits_book.asp.

Print copies are also available for purchase from the U.S. Government Printing Office, Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D.C. 20402, Web site: <http://bookstore.gpo.gov>.

VA's World Wide Web pages are updated throughout the year to present the most current information. The VA home page (www.va.gov) contains links to selections on compensation and pension benefits, health care benefits and services, burial and memorial benefits, and much more.

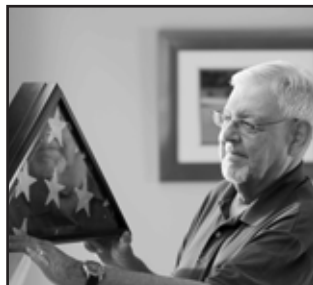


Other Benefits

In addition to the programs described elsewhere in this newsletter, individual Veterans may be eligible for the full range of other benefits offered by VA, including education and training, vocational rehabilitation, home loan guaranties, life insurance, pension, burial benefits, and more.

To learn more about VA's programs, Veterans and other interested parties can visit VA's home page at www.va.gov or call **1-800-827-1000**.

For additional information on other benefits programs, please check online at www.vba.va.gov/VBA/benefits/factsheets.



New Brochure (continued from page 1)

Copies of the brochure have been distributed to VA medical centers (environmental health coordinators and clinicians, OEF/OIF program staff, and public affairs officers), community-based outpatient clinics, Vet centers, program offices, regional offices, national cemetery directors, and Veteran service organizations.

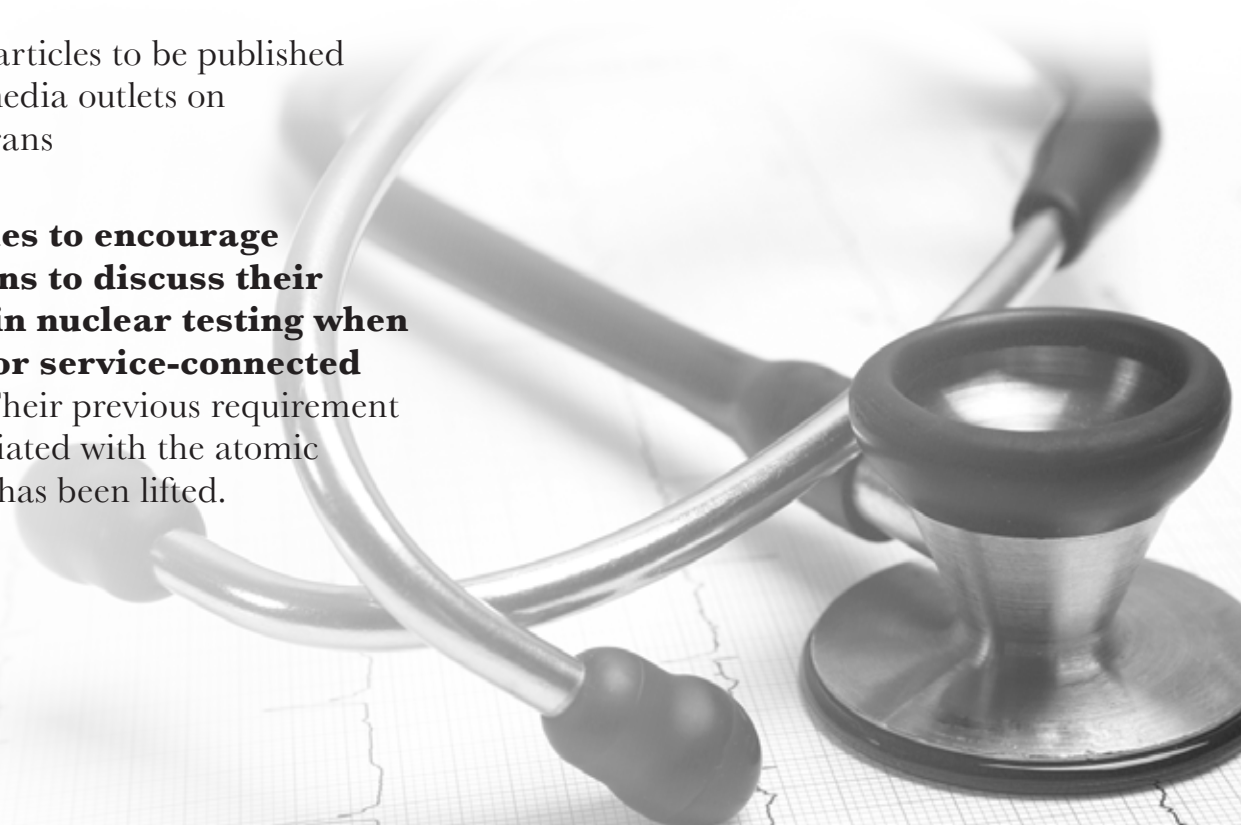
The brochure and other information for Veterans exposed to ionizing radiation is available at **www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/radiation**.

VBDR Continues Work (continued from page 1)


- Continued review of DTRA and VA procedures and quality programs
- Worked with VA and DTRA to distribute “Are You an Atomic Veteran?” brochure
- Used social media channels to reach children and grandchildren of Atomic Veterans
- Encouraged articles to be published in national media outlets on Atomic Veterans


For more information about VA radiation-related programs, go to **www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/radiation** or call **1-800-827-1000** for service-connected disability claims or general information about VA benefits.


VBDR continues to encourage Atomic Veterans to discuss their participation in nuclear testing when filing claims for service-connected disabilities. Their previous requirement for secrecy associated with the atomic testing program has been lifted.



Where to Get Help and Additional Information

 VA Health Care Benefits	1-877-222-8387
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 Other VA Benefits Information	1-800-827-1000
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 Ionizing Radiation Information	www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/radiation
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 Nearest VA Medical Center	www.va.gov/directory
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Questions and Answers

Q: *Who should I contact if I need prompt medical treatment for conditions related to exposure to radiation during military service?*

A: 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 ionizing radiation have been assigned to category six in the enrollment priorities system.

Call **1-877-222-8387** for information on this subject.

Q: *Who should I contact if have encountered difficulties at a VA Medical Center?*

A: Contact the Patient Advocate or Patient Representative at that facility for assistance in resolving the problem.

Q: *Where can I find additional resources?*

A: The main VA Web site is **www.va.gov**. Also, Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) are some of the many other very helpful resources for Veterans exposed to ionizing radiation. Representatives of various VSOs include:

- 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

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.



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Ionizing Radiation Review
INFORMATION FOR VETERANS
EXPOSED TO IONIZING RADIATION
AND THEIR FAMILIES
March 2012

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