



IOWA COUNTY VETERANS NEWSLETTER

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SPRING, 2022

MEMORIAL DAY FLAG ORDER

Posts and Cemetery Officials please contact the Veterans Service Office with your Memorial Day flag order by March 25th.

VA BURN PIT PROGRAM

Disability payouts for new conditions related to burn pit smoke and other combat zone toxic exposure incidents likely will not happen for another six months at the earliest, but Veterans Affairs leaders insist they're moving as quickly as they can to address the problem. "It's still the fastest route from here to making good on what so many of our veterans are owed," said Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough during a press conference with reporters on 18 NOV. "We're making this faster, we're making it more transparent, we're making it more responsive and more based on veterans experiences."

On Veterans Day, White House officials announced plans to overhaul the process for approving new illnesses and injuries believed connected to military toxic exposure cases. That includes a 90-day review of numerous rare cancers believed linked to military burn pits, with recommendations on whether they should be given fast-track benefits status. However, even if those conditionals are approved, it will take at least another three months before payouts to eligible veterans can begin, McDonough said.

That puts checks in the mail no earlier than late May 2022, and likely later if the rulemaking process for those changes has any delays. Other illnesses — such as constrictive bronchiolitis, widely believed to be

linked to breathing in toxic smoke in war zones — are expected to take several more months of research and planning.

Veterans advocates for years have pushed for immediate action on the issue of burn pit injuries for individuals suffering from unusual cancers and respiratory failure, saying some victims have suffered for a decade or more without any compensation for their injuries. Presumptive status for disability benefits allows veterans an easier path to getting financial compensation for their service-connected injuries, because it does not require individuals to prove their condition is the result of a specific incident while in the ranks. That's particularly difficult in cases where burn pit smoke was believed to be the cause of subsequent sicknesses, because few records exist of what items were being burned in the waste fires and exactly where the toxic smoke traveled.

In August, the VA announced for the first time they would grant presumptive benefits status for three illnesses linked to burn pit exposure: asthma, rhinitis and sinusitis. McDonough said 18 NOV that since the summer, VA processors have approved nearly 4,700 cases related to those conditions and paid out more than \$14 million in related benefits. The department estimates as many as 300,000 veterans may be eligible under that change. Adding the cancers and other related illnesses could push that total even higher. Veterans Affairs officials have estimated more than 3.5 million troops were exposed to the toxic smoke from burn pits during overseas deployments over the last 20 years.

VA officials are expected to announce the results of their first new review — focused on cancers believed linked to burn pits — in mid-February. That work

will also serve as a new model for how future presumptive condition reviews are conducted. McDonough said 18 NOV that officials are not looking at lowering scientific standards for making those determinations, but they will no longer defer completely to studies from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to make their decisions. In the past, VA officials have pushed off action on burn pit benefits citing a lack of specific evidence from those researchers on the topic. “There’s a lot of other science available to us on this,” he said. “For example, firefighters spend a lot of time dealing with toxic exposure. We’re widening the aperture for available science.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | November 19, 2021]

PRESUMPTIVE EXPOSURE CLAIM

Were you exposed to hazardous materials while serving in the military, such as from Agent Orange or burn pits? Did you serve in Vietnam, Thailand or Southwest Asia? If so, you may be eligible to file for service-connected benefits based on presumptive exposure. Over the course of the last six months, VA has begun processing service-connected disability claims for six new presumptive conditions related to exposure to hazardous materials.

In May 2021, VA started implementing provisions of the William M. Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 (NDAA), adding bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinsonism to the list of medical conditions presumptively associated with exposure to Agent Orange. A few months later, VA added asthma, rhinitis and sinusitis (to include rhino sinusitis) on a presumptive basis based on particulate matter exposures during military service in Southwest Asia and certain other areas. Any Veteran who was previously denied service-connection for any of these six conditions but had symptoms manifest within 10 years of military service would need to file another claim.

Be sure to use VA Form 20-0995 “Decision Review Request – Supplemental Claim” when filing. An online fillable one is available at <https://search.yahoo.com/search?p=va+form+20-0995+fillable+pdf&fr=yfp-t-s&ei=UTF-8&fp=1>. The claim form should include the name of the medical condition and also specify that the medical condition is being claimed due to in-service exposure to environmental hazards. VA is committed to assisting Veterans

who may have been exposed to hazardous materials during their military service. Be sure to stay plugged in to www.va.gov for recent developments around environmental hazards; VA is constantly conducting research and surveillance, as well as reviewing scientific literature for conditions that may be related to exposure during military service.

If you feel you have a chronic condition attributed to an in-service exposure, you are encouraged you to file a claim. For more information about VA benefits and eligibility, or how to file a claim, Veterans and survivors can visit VA’s website at <https://www.va.gov> or call toll free at 1-800-827-1000. [Source: The Patriot Reader Newsletter | Bill Dudley | January 2022]

TEXT MESSAGE SCAMS

News reports state that COVID numbers are starting to decrease across much of the nation. Unfortunately, con artists are not decreasing their efforts to prey on price-conscious consumers trying to save money where they can. BBB Scam Tracker has seen numerous reports of scammers impersonating well-known companies and offering COVID-19 themed discounts.

How the Scam Works:

You receive a text message from a large, reputable company. The message claims that, due to the pandemic, the company would like to help people out by offering them an amazing deal. These range from free or discounted services to gift cards and cash. For example, consumers reported receiving the following text messages using this ploy: “*COVID-19 REFUND. VERIZON COMPANY is giving out \$950 to all users of our Verizon service, If yes kindly text your Verizon*” or “*Due to the pandemic, Hulu is giving everyone a free 1-year subscription to help you stay at home. Get yours here [link].*”

Of course, these messages do not really originate with that company. They come from impersonators who hope to steal your personal information. If you click the link, you may be prompted to log into a lookalike website that scammers use to get hold of your login ID and password. With that information, scammers can access your accounts and even make purchases using your saved payment methods. While the latest BBB Scam Tracker reports mention Hulu,

Netflix, and Verizon, watch out for scammers impersonating other companies too. If one name stops being effective, they will quickly switch to another company.

How to avoid text message scams:

Treat messages from unknown senders with caution. If you receive a message from a number you don't recognize, be careful. Many companies engage in SMS marketing, but keep in mind that consumers must opt in to receive messages. If you haven't given a company permission to text you, it's probably a scam. Don't click on links from strangers. Scammers often send shortened links that don't let you see where they really lead in the body of their text message. If you click the link, you could be directed to a dangerous website, or you could download malware onto your device. Confirm deals directly with the company before you accept. If you are really hoping the deal is legitimate, go to the company's official website and send them an email, or call to inquire. The company can let you know if the deal is real or not. Install antivirus software on your computer and mobile devices. This kind of scam can come from text messages or emails, so make sure all your electronics are protected. Antivirus software can scan for malware and alert you before you open a malicious website link. For More Information Learn more about this kind of scam by reading the BBB Tip on phishing scams at: <https://www.bbb.org/article/news-releases/16758-bbb-tip-phishing-scams>. If you've spotted a scam (whether or not you've lost money), report it to BBB at <https://www.bbb.org/ScamTracker>. Your report can help others avoid falling victim to scams. Find more information about scams and how to avoid them at BBB's website <https://www.bbb.org/article/scams/8767-bbb-tips-10-stepsto-avoid-scams>.

[Source: BBB Scam Alerts]

POST-COVID VA DEBT COLLECTION PLAN

The Department of Veterans Affairs officials announced in a 4 OCT release it will resume collecting debts from overpaid veterans, ending the nearly 18-month-long suspension of debt collection put into place because of the COVID-19 pandemic. All debt collection by the VA has been suspended since April 6, 2020, as a result of an executive order by then-President Donald Trump. President Joe Biden extended that suspension until Sept. 30, 2021. Veterans

also have been exempt from medical-care copayments for medications and services provided by the VA from April 6, 2020, until Sept. 30, 2021, under the provisions of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. However, the moratorium on debt collection and the exemption of medical-care copayments have expired. This means that any medical debts incurred by veterans before April 6, 2020, will now be subject to collection. Also, any debts for benefits such as compensation, or GI Bill payments, are now subject to collection. VA officials did not say how many veterans are impacted. The VA has begun sending out debt notification letters to affected veterans. Steps will be taken to withhold debts from benefit payments beginning Jan. 1, 2022, if veterans do not make payment arrangements before that date. Debt notification letters will include options to request debt relief for those who continue to experience financial loss because of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Options could include a repayment plan, compromise offer or waiver, according to the VA. Veterans with more questions about medical or pharmacy debts should contact the Health Resource Center at 1-866-400-1238. Those with benefit-related debt can call the Debt Management Center at 1-800-827-0648 or visit <https://www.va.gov/manage-va-debt>.

WISCONSIN VETERANS MUSEUM

Currently on display through 2022 at the Wisconsin Veterans Museum, 30 W. Mifflin St., Madison, WI, is a display titled "Souvenirs of Service: The Things They Kept". Service members have been collecting souvenirs since the Civil War, this display opened in November 2021 and encompasses items collected by Wisconsin service members from the Civil War era to modern day ranging from artillery shells to Zippo lighters and everything in between. Each item is presented along with the backstory. There are several one-of-a-kind items on display as including a hand-made French mandolin with the 32nd "Red Arrow" Division insignia, an evening gown made from a parachute that saved her husband's life and a good luck doll that accompanied a fighter pilot on 67 combat missions, which he credits for his never being shot down. These are just a few of the numerous items and stories the exhibit encompasses. For additional information regarding the hours of operation for the museum you are encouraged to contact them at (608)267-1799.

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**Veterans
Newsletter**

IMPORTANT DATES

March 13 th	Daylight savings time begins. "Spring Ahead"
March 25 th	Flag Orders for Memorial Day are due from Posts and Cemetery Officials
April 17 th	Easter
May 8 th	Mother's Day
May 21 st	Armed Forces Day
May 30 th	Memorial Day

VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE CLOSINGS

Good Friday	Friday, April 15 th
CVSO Training Conference	April 18-22 (Available by phone or e-mail)
Memorial Day	Monday, May 30 th