

# 10 Things to Know: Airborne Hazards and Burn Pit Exposure

Exposure to airborne hazards is a serious concern for many Veterans and active-duty service members. You can help VA provide better care and service to all Veterans - even if you don't think you were exposed. Here's what you need to know.

## 1 What are airborne hazards?

"Airborne hazard" refers to any sort of potentially toxic substance that you are exposed to through the air you breathe. While on active duty, military service members may have been exposed to a variety of airborne hazards including:

- Smoke and fumes from open burn pits
- Sand, dust, and particulate matter
- General air pollution common in certain countries
- Fuel, aircraft exhaust, and other mechanical fumes
- Smoke from oil well fires

## 2 What are burn pits?

The Department of Defense defines an open burn pit as an area of land used for the open-air combustion of trash and other solid waste products. They were commonly used by the U.S. military in Southwest Asia, Afghanistan, and other areas.

Waste products commonly disposed of in open burn pits include chemicals, paint, medical and human waste, metal/aluminum cans, munitions, unexploded ordnance, petroleum and lubricant products, plastics, rubber, wood, and food waste.

## 3 Can exposure to these hazards affect my health?

Whether you experience health issues related to airborne hazard exposures depends on a variety of factors. Many health conditions related to these hazards are temporary and should disappear after the exposure ends. Other longer-term health issues may be caused by a combination of hazardous exposures, injuries, or illnesses you may have experienced during your military service. Factors that may indicate greater or lesser risk for short or long-term health effects include:

- Types of waste burned
- Proximity, amount of time, and frequency of exposure
- Wind direction and other weather-related factors
- Presence of other airborne or environmental hazards in the area

## 4 Can I get health care from VA for issues related to my exposures?

Yes, we encourage all Veterans concerned about their military exposures talk to their health care provider and apply for VA health care. Once enrolled, your VA care team will work with you to understand your health concerns and connect you with the care and services you need to get – and stay – healthy.

## 5 What is the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry?

VA established the registry in 2014 to put data to work for Veterans and help us better understand the potential health effects of exposure to airborne hazards during military service. By joining the registry, you can provide information that supports ongoing research and helps VA provide better care to all Veterans. Joining the registry can also help you identify health concerns, discuss them with your health care providers, and get follow-up care.

## 6 Who is eligible for the registry?

If you were deployed to the Southwest Asia theater of operations any time after August 2, 1990 or Afghanistan or Djibouti on or after September 11, 2001, you are eligible to participate. **You can join even if:**

- You don't think you were exposed to specific airborne hazards.
- You are not experiencing symptoms or illnesses you think are related to your exposures.
- You have not filed a VA claim for compensation and benefits or applied for VA health care.
- You are still an active duty service member, reservist, or have returned to active service.

If you are not eligible for the registry but are concerned about your exposures, you can still apply for VA health care and file a claim for compensation and benefits.

## 7 How do I join?

To join the registry, sign into the secure portal using your Premium DS Logon Level 2 credentials to check your eligibility and complete the online questionnaire. If you already have a VA eBenefits or MyHealthVet premium account, you can use the same credentials for the registry.

The questionnaire asks questions about your deployments, health history, lifestyle, and other factors. It usually takes about an hour to complete depending on your number of deployments.

Visit [www.publichealth.VA.gov/airbornehazards](http://www.publichealth.VA.gov/airbornehazards) to learn more about how to get started.

## 8 What happens after I complete the questionnaire?

When you're done with the questionnaire, print or save your responses for your records. We also encourage you to schedule the free, optional environmental health evaluation. Notes from your evaluation will be used to support research into the health effects of airborne hazards. It can also help you learn more about your exposures and discuss them with your health care provider.

## 9 Can participating in the registry affect my VA claim?

Participating in the registry cannot negatively impact your ability to receive compensation, benefits, or health care from VA. You can submit your responses or notes from the health evaluation separately if you choose.

## 10 How can I learn more?

Visit [www.publichealth.VA.gov/airbornehazards](http://www.publichealth.VA.gov/airbornehazards) to learn more about airborne hazards and the registry. You can also contact the environmental health coordinator at your VA for more information.

We encourage all Veterans concerned about their military exposures to talk to their health care provider, apply for VA health care, and file a claim for compensation and benefits.



Scan this QR code with your smartphone camera to learn more.

Apply for VA Health Care: [www.VA.gov/health-care](http://www.VA.gov/health-care) or call 877-222-8387

File a Claim: [www.VA.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim](http://www.VA.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim)

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