IONIZING RADIATION REVIEW

www.va.gov/IRAD

Information for Veterans Exposed to Ionizing Radiation and Their Families

Vol. 2, No. 2 **August 2005**

A NOTE FROM THE NEW SECRETARY ON CARE FOR VETERANS EXPOSED TO IONIZING RADIATION

Since this newsletter was created a little more than a year ago, VA has distributed more than 100,000 copies to veterans, VA medical centers, veterans service organizations, Vet Centers -- anywhere that veterans might gather. This is part of our ongoing commitment to the men and women who may have been exposed to ionizing radiation during their military service.

Today's headlines may be filled with stories about Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, but at VA, we remember the veterans of earlier conflicts also whose sacrifices to their nation included exposure to hazardous substances. Ionizing radiation, like Agent Orange and the medical problems affecting some of our Desert Storm veterans, proves that bullets and shrapnel are not the only hazards of the modern battlefield.

Like my 237,000 professional colleagues at VA and like millions of Americans across the country, I recognize, appreciate and honor your sacrifices. The risks you faced were unique, and I am committed to providing the care, benefits and other programs that your service has earned.

We also look to you, the veterans exposed to ionizing radiation, along with your families and comrades, to help spread the word. This newsletter is just one way VA is reaching out to veterans whose health has been affected by ionizing radiation during their military service. We welcome your suggestions to improve our programs, and we salute you for your service and sacrifice.

R. James Nicholson
Secretary of Veterans Affairs

NEW SOFTWARE TO HELP EVALUATE CLAIMS

VA and the Department of Health and Human Services together sponsored a project to update and expand the 1985 National Institutes of Health radio epidemiological tables in the form of a computer software program. Designated as the Interactive Radio Epidemiological Program (IREP), the program helps in evaluation of ionizing radiation claims.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) is using a slightly modified version of IREP to evaluate claims from nuclear energy workers, which VA also is using to assist in evaluating some veterans' claims.

The NIOSH software, is entitled the Interactive Radioepidemiological Programs for Estimating Probability of Cancer Causation for Exposures to Radiation, and is available on the Internet at the following address:
http://198.144.166.6/irep_niosh/

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INDEPENDENT STUDY GUIDE FOR DOCTORS ON VETERANS & RADIATION UPDATED

In November 2004, an updated version of the VA independent study guide for doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals, entitled "Veterans & Radiation" was issued. To obtain a copy of the guide veterans may contact Dr. Robert Smith, VA Employee Education Resource Center, Medical Forum, Suite 950, North 22nd Street, Birmingham, AL 35203-5300, e-mail : **bob.Smith@lrn.VA.gov**. The revised guide is also available on the Internet at the following web address: **www1.VA.gov/vhi/docs/Radiationfinal.pdf.**

On May 5, 2005, Change 1 to this guide was issued since screening doses from the Committee on Interagency Radiation Research and Policy Coordination (CIRRPC) are no longer used and the Interactive Radio Epidemiological Program (IREP) is being used exclusively when applicable (see previous article).

As part of the Veterans Health Initiative (VHI), these independent study guides were designed to provide medical information on special health concerns of veterans. Currently, fifteen topics are covered by VHI independent study courses for health care providers and others. For more information, visit **www.va.gov/vhi.**

NEW ADVISORY BOARD ON RADIATION DOSE RECONSTRUCTION ESTABLISHED

In early June 2005, the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) – part of the Department of Defense – and VA announced the establishment of the Veterans' Advisory Board on Dose Reconstruction (VBDR). The Board will take a close look at dose reconstructions and VA claims decisions for service connection of radiogenic diseases and improve communications with veterans.

The VA and DoD established the 16-member board in accordance with Section 601 of Public Law 108-183. Retired Navy Vice Admiral James A. Zimble, M.D., a former Surgeon General of the Navy, will serve as the first chairman. The Board is composed of experts in radiation health effects and risk communication, veterans and representatives from the sponsoring governmental organizations. The new Board is expected to meet up to six times a year. The National Council on Radiation Protection and Measurements will provide technical and administrative support.

In response to concerns about the possibility of an elevated risk of cancer and other illnesses in veterans exposed to radiation or fallout from nuclear weapons, several laws have been passed by Congress on the reconstruction of radiation doses and the adjudication of claims of service-connected disabilities from radiation health effects.

Recent reports of the Congressional General Accounting Office and the National Academy of Sciences reports identified problems in dose reconstruction and compensation claims programs for eligible veterans. The Board will make recommendations, as appropriate, on modifications in dose reconstruction procedures.

2005 EDITION OF FEDERAL BENEFITS BOOKLET HIGHLIGHTS IONIZING RADIATION REGISTRY PROGRAM

Under the broad heading *"Health Care Programs"* the latest version (2005 Edition) of the ***Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents***, one of the Government Printing Office top sellers, includes the following language.

Veteran Health Registries

VA maintains veteran health registries to provide special health examinations and health-related information to certain groups of veterans.

Ionizing Radiation Registry: *For veterans possibly exposed to atomic radiation during the following activities: participation in tests involving the atmospheric detonation of a nuclear device; occupation of Hiroshima or Nagasaki from Aug. 6, 1945, through July 1, 1946; internment as a prisoner of war in Japan during World War II; serving in official military duties at the Department of Energy gaseous diffusion plants at Paducah, KY.; Portmouth, Ohio; or the K-25 area at Oak Ridge Tenn., for at least 250 days before Feb. 1, 1992, or in Longshot, Milrow or Cannikin underground nuclear tests at Amchitka Island, Alaska, before Jan. 1, 1974; or treatment with nasopharyngeal (NP) radium during military service.*

Veterans eligible for participation in any VA registry may receive free, comprehensive registry medical examinations, including laboratory and other diagnostic tests deemed necessary by an examining clinician. Eligible veterans do not have to be enrolled in VA health care to participate in registry examinations. Veterans wishing to participate should contact the nearest VA health care facility or visit the Internet: ***http://www.va.gov/environagents/.***

The popular 120-page federal benefits booklet provides an overview of programs and services offered by VA and other federal agencies The information can be viewed and printed without charge from the VA web site at **www.va.gov/opa/feature** and is available for purchase at 866-512-1800 (toll-free) from the Government Printing Office. The stock number is 051-000-00228-8. The price is $7.

Informacion Para Veteranos de Habla Hispana y sus Dependientes

La version en espanol de este folleto se encuentra disponible en formato Adobe Acrobat a traves de el link (www.va.gov/opa/feature/index.htm) en la pagina de la Oficina de Asuntos Publicos del Departamento de Asuntos de Veteranos (VA) en la red mundial del internet. Las oficinas del VA en areas de gran concentracion de veteran nos y dependientes hispanos tienen disponibles consejeros bilingues que le pueden ayudar a aplicar para obtener beneficios. Puede encotratr una lista de las oficinas del VA en la parte de atras de este folleto.

IONIZING RADIATION REGISTRY STATISTICS

Examinations by Year

Year	Number of Examinations
2000	170
2001	269
2002	448
2003	650
2004	483
First 3 months of 2005 – 127	

Total exams done (including follow-up examinations) – 24,059

Total initial examinations (one per person) – 23,069

Total individuals eligible for examination – About 400,000

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 programs to respond to this health risk.

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 third issue of the "Ionizing Radiation Review" newsletter. The initial issue carried a February 2004 date, and the second issue was dated December 2004. We anticipate publication once or twice annually, depending on the amount of news on this subject, budgetary considerations, and interest. This newsletter was completed in early June 2005, 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.

Current and back issues of the "Reviews" are posted on the Internet at **www.va.gov/IRAD**.

CONDITIONS RECOGNIZED FOR SERVICE-CONNECTION BASED ON EXPOSURE TO IONIZING RADIATION

The following conditions have been presumptively recognized by VA for service-connection. That means that veterans with certain types of exposures* to ionizing radiation who have one of the illnesses listed below are eligible for disability compensation from VA and do not have to prove that their condition was caused by ionizing radiation exposure to be eligible for disability compensation from VA.

- Leukemia other than chronic lymphocyctic leukemia;
- Cancer of the thyroid;

** The types of exposures, except for NP radium treatments, described in the first paragraph about the Ionizing Radiation Registry on page 2 qualify for "presumptive" compensation.*

- 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 urethera);
- 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; and
- Cancer of the ovary.

Please Note: To be considered for disability compensation, a veteran must specifically apply for that benefit. Participation in the Ionizing Radiation Registry does not automatically constitute an application for compensation benefits.

HOW TO GET DISABILITY COMPENSATION

Like all veterans, veterans exposed to ionizing radiation are eligible for monthly payments, called disability compensation, from VA if they are suffering with any illnesses or injuries that VA determined to have been incurred or aggravated during active military service. Veterans exposed to ionizing radiation also have special access to disability compensation for illnesses or injuries related to exposure to ionizing radiation. Furthermore, the service of the veteran must have been terminated from military service 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. The receipt of military retirement pay, disability severance pay, and separation incentive payments known as SSB and VSI (Special Separation Benefits and Voluntary Separation Incentives) also affects the amount of VA compensation paid. Under current law, the payment of VA compensation will affect the amount received in military retirement pay, disability severance pay, SSB, and VSI.

The disability ratings range from 0 to 100 percent (in increments of 10 percent). For example, in 2005, a veteran with a disability rating of 10 percent receives $108; a veteran with disability rating of 50 percent gets $663; and a veteran who is totally disabled and therefore, evaluated at 100 percent receives $2,299 monthly.

Veterans with disability ratings between 30 and 100 percent are also eligible for monthly allowances for a spouse ranging from $39 to $136, and for each child, $19 to $65. (The amount depends on the disability rating.)

A veteran who is in need of regular aid and attendance of another person, or who is permanently housebound may be entitled to additional benefits. VA must make the determination before the veteran can get these benefits.

Presumptive Service-Connection

A veteran who was exposed to ionizing radiation under certain conditions* and has one or more of the diseases on the list of presumptive conditions that VA maintains is presumed by VA that his or her disease is recognized for service-connection if rated as 10 percent or more disabling. The current list is provided in this issue. This list and information about the diseases associated with Ionizing Radiation also are available online at **www.VA.gov/IRAD**.

Nonpresumptive Compensation – Direct Service Connection

To determine service-connection for other conditions or exposures not eligible for presumptive compensation, VA adjudicators consider each case individually, looking at a number of factors, including the amount of radiation exposure, duration of exposure, elapsed time between exposure and onset of the disease, gender, family history, age at the time of exposure, the extent to which a nonservice-related exposure could contribute to the disease, and the relative sensitivity of exposed tissue.

VA regulations define all cancers as possibly caused by radiation. Other non-malignant conditions might be caused by radiation include certain types of cataracts; non-malignant thyroid nodular disease; parathryroid adenoma; and tumors of the brain and central nervous system. For a given individual, VA

** See footnote on Page 3*

will consider the possibility that other diseases were caused by radiation, if supported by medical/scientific evidence. To be eligible for compensation, VA must determine that it is at least as likely as not that a veteran's illness was caused by his/her exposure to radiation during military service.

Must Apply to Be Considered

Compensation is not automatically given to any veteran. VA veterans service representatives (VSRs) can provide the necessary application and assist veterans who need help in completing it. VSRs are located at all VA Regional Offices, in VA medical centers, and at most VA clinics. For help in locating a VSR near you, call the following toll-free telephone number: **1-800-827-1000**.

Other Benefits

In addition to the compensation program described above, individual veterans may be eligible for health care and the full range of other benefits offered by VA, including education and training, vocational rehabilitation, home loan guarantees, life insurance, pension, burial benefits, and more.

To learn more about VA's programs, veterans and other interested parties can visit the VA home page **http://www.VA.gov**, or call **1-800-827-1000**.

VA DISABILITY COMPENSATION RATES FOR 2005

Disability Rating	No Dependents	Veteran With Spouse Only
10%	$108	
20%	$210	
30%	$324	$363
40%	$466	$518
50%	$663	$728
60%	$839	$917
70%	$1,056	$1,147
80%	$1,227	$1,311
90%	$1,380	$1,497
100%	$2,299	$2,429

For additional rate information, see compensation rate tables online at **www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Rates/comp01.htm**.

VET CENTERS SERVE COMBAT VETERANS OF ALL ERAS

Originally established to help Vietnam veterans with readjustment problems, the highly successful Vet Center program, managed by the Readjustment Counseling Service, has expanded its scope and currently provides valuable services to combat veterans of World War II, the Korean War, the Gulf War, and the campaigns in Lebanon, Grenada, Panama, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, the global war on terror, as well as the Vietnam Conflict. Vet Centers also provide bereavement counseling to family members. For a full list of Vet Centers, see **www/.va.gov/rcs/eligibility.htm**.

As the scope expanded, so did the number of sites where veterans could get help. In 1980, only a year after the centers first opened, there were 91 Vet Centers. Ten years later, in 1990, there were a total of 201 Vet Centers. Six additional locations subsequently were added. VA Vet Center officials indicate that the program has helped more than 2 million veterans since the program started in 1979.

PTSD and Military Service

The Vet Centers' priority is readjustment counseling, not only for veterans but also for families of veterans. Readjustment counseling is aimed to support veterans adjust to feelings of anger, unfamiliarity, or isolation that they might experience returning from military service. Readjustment problems also can include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

PTSD is a common reaction that often comes after a person experiences or witnesses a trauma such as war or sexual assault. Loneliness, isolation, and change in environment while in combat can also cause PTSD. When PTSD is not dealt with, an individual can experience a range of sometimes disabling emotions and experiences such as grief, anxiety, and difficulty trusting others. About 25 percent of soldiers involved in combat and 15 percent of soldiers who were not directly involved in combat experience PTSD or PTSD-like problems.

Veterans Helping Veterans

About 70 percent of the Vet Center counselors working with veterans are former veterans themselves, and 50 percent of them have been in combat. Many Vietnam veterans feel more comfortable knowing that they are talking with someone who knows of the ordeals and distress that sometimes comes with being involved in combat.

The Centers also provide bereavement counseling to spouses, parents, and children of Armed Forces personnel who died while serving in combat. The counseling services for families consist of extensive transition services, such as outreach and referral services. Like readjustment counseling, bereavement counseling is provided free of charge.

The Vet Center's programs for veteran's offer trauma counseling, focus on special populations, networking, wellness, leadership, management, and transitional assistance. These programs provide individual, group, or marital and family counseling, medical referrals, assistance in applying for VA benefits, employment counseling, guidance and referral, alcohol/drug evaluations, information and referral to community resources, sexual trauma counseling and referral, and community education. Participants in Vet Centers often receive additional assistance from VA medical centers or regional offices. For additional information regarding this program and the nearest Vet Center, call toll free **1-800-827-1000** or go to **www.va.gov/rcs**.

The above article was extracted from an article by Connie Torres who served as a summer intern in the Environmental Agents Service.

READERS' SURVEY

The editor of this newsletter is seeking feedback on the three issues published to date. 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 restrict your comments to those things we can change about the Ionizing Radiation Review that will make it more useful.

We want your ideas with regard to the newsletter. You are welcome and even encouraged to bring other problems to our attention in another letter. Please send your survey response to Mr. Donald J. Rosenblum, Environmental Agents Service (131), ATTN: IRR REVIEW 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.

Are you a veteran? Yes No

Are you the spouse of a veteran? Yes No

Other _____

Are you a first time reader of this newsletter? Yes No

What do you think of the Review?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Does it meet your needs? Why or why not

_____
_____
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_____

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

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Additional comments or suggestions?

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

VETERANS WHO HAVE IONIZING RADIATION EXPOSURE

This newsletter is primarily for veterans who were present during the construction and/or atmospheric testing of nuclear weaponry; who served in the occupation of Japan shortly after World War II who were treated with nasopharyngeal (NP) radium during military service; and who were exposed to depleted uranium; plus, those individuals who participated in the following radiation risk activities:

at the Department of Energy gaseous diffusion plants at Paducah, KY, Portsmouth, OH, or K25 area at Oak Ridge, TN, at least 250 days before February 1, 1992; and those present at underground nuclear tests at Amchita Island, AK, before January 1, 1974; and also veterans who may have been exposed to radiation during military service in other ways, such as service as a nuclear submariner, x-ray or dental technician, etc.

WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

For many 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. Eligible veterans who were exposed to radiation during their military service 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 supervises) the registry examination; the Coordinator is responsible for handling the administrative aspects of the 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. They can contact the nearest VA medical center to find out who the Environmental Health Coordinator and Clinician are or they can access our website at **http://www.va.gov/EnvironAgents/page.cfm/pg=5** for a directory or coordinator.

Veterans who need prompt medical treatment for conditions that may be related to their exposure to radiation during military service can 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 **(1-877-222-8387)** for information on this subject.

Veterans with illnesses incurred in or aggravated by exposure to radiation or some other aspect of military service can contact a VA veterans services representative (VSR) at the nearest VA regional office 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 **http://vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp**.

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

Representatives of various Veteran Service Organizations can be very helpful, 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.

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.

Department of Veterans Affairs

Environmental Agents Service (131)
VA Central Office
810 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20420

OFFICIAL BUSINESS
Penalty for private use $300

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