

Fulfilling Our Promise: Breaking New Ground for Veterans Exposed to Herbicides

by Bill Clark, National Commander, AMVETS

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has embarked on a commendable journey to address the lingering injustices faced by countless American veterans exposed to Agent Orange and other herbicides. The newly proposed rule to expand the presumptive locations and time frames for exposure to these toxic substances marks a pivotal step toward rectifying a historical oversight. This expansion is not just an administrative adjustment; it's a bold declaration of the nation's commitment to those who served it.

This proposed rule change acknowledges the reality of their service and the risks they took. By including locations in the United States, Canada, and India, the VA recognizes the global scale of herbicide testing and storage and, by extension, the potential exposure of veterans serving in these areas.

This change is rooted in understanding the challenges veterans face and a commitment to addressing those challenges with empathy and action. The VA is taking proactive steps to acknowledge the debt of gratitude owed to these veterans and actively fulfill their commitment to repay that debt.

The historic expansion under the PACT Act and other legislative measures has rightly increased the scope of care and benefits available to veterans. This rule would further cement the VA's role in delivering world-class health care and benefits to all veterans, particularly those affected by toxic exposures.

VA Secretary Denis McDonough's statement underscores the core of this initiative: making it easier for veterans exposed to herbicides outside of Vietnam to access their benefits. It reflects a broader commitment to ensuring that every veteran from every era receives the care and benefits they deserve. This initiative is not just about addressing past injustices; it's about setting a precedent for how veterans are treated in the future. This rule is a testament to the nation's evolving understanding of the impacts of military service and a recognition of its duty to care for those who have answered the call to defend it.

As a nation, we must continue to support such measures, ensuring that our veterans receive the care and benefits they have earned. AMVETS wholeheartedly supports this effort by the VA and hopes for the best outcomes possible for our veterans, service members, and their families,

AMVETS National Commander Bill Clark assumed his position this year after serving as the First, Second, and Third Vice Commander at the post, department, and national levels. He has been integral to AMVETS since joining Post 906 in North Carolina in 1998. Bill Clark served 14 years in the Marine Corps, encompassing active and reserve duty. During peacetime, he was deployed to the Western Pacific and Korea.