

PROSTATE CANCER AND AGENT ORANGE

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There are several medical conditions which have been determined to be related to Agent Orange exposure. Congress has declared that any service member who served in Vietnam during the war-time era (Feb 28, 1961, through May 7, 1975) was exposed to Agent Orange. It was further ruled that such exposure may have caused several types of cancer. Therefore, diagnosis of any of these conditions will be considered "service connected" by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Veterans and survivors may be entitled to compensation for such diseases as lung cancer, multiple myeloma, Hodgkin's disease, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and, as of November, 1996, Prostate Cancer. If a Vietnam veteran is ever diagnosed with prostate cancer, even if it is many years after service, it will be considered a service connected disability and compensation may be paid. Compensation can range from \$0 (non-disabling) to around \$2000 (totally disabling). The degree of disability is determined by such factors as urinary frequency, leakage, and impotence. For example, daytime voiding interval of less than one hour or awakening to void five or more times per night will result in a rating of 40%. Awakening to void twice per night is rated 10%. Continual urine leakage or incontinence requiring the wearing of absorbent materials which must be changed more than four times per day will result in a 60% rating. If the pad must be changed less than twice a day, the rating is 20%. A small special monthly compensation is paid for impotence. The symptoms must be medically documented - usually by a physical examination at a VA medical facility.

A veteran files a claim on VA form 21-526 (Claim for Compensation or Pension.) It must be accompanied by DD Form 214 showing Vietnam service and any medical evidence establishing the diagnosis of prostate cancer. If the veteran has already completed that form in the past, it is not necessary to do so again. A brief letter requesting reopening the claim will suffice. Here is a suggested format for that letter: "This is to amend my original disability compensation claim to include Prostate Cancer as per new Agent Orange regulations. Medical records showing the diagnosis are attached".

The claim should be submitted to the VA Regional Office serving the area where the veteran resides. To obtain a claim form or to get the address of the VA, call 1-800-827-1000. Help in completing the form is available from many veterans service organizations or from the VA.

Other veterans' benefits may accrue as a result of a finding of service connection. They include insurance, medical treatment, and vocational rehabilitation.

Survivors of Vietnam veterans who died of prostate cancer may also be entitled to benefits from the VA. An unremarried surviving spouse may be entitled to a monthly payment of Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC). The

current rate is \$861. Dependents' Education Assistance may also be available for college attendance. That rate for full-time attendance is \$485 per month.