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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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SDDVA Secretary Whitlock's July Column – Disability Benefits Available to Vietnam Blue Water Navy Veterans Serving Offshore

With the passage of the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019, Blue Water Navy Veterans are now entitled to a presumption of service connection for conditions related to Agent Orange exposure.

Veterans aboard a vessel operating not more than 12 nautical miles seaward from the demarcation line of the waters of Vietnam and Cambodia between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975, are presumed to have been exposed to herbicides such as Agent Orange and may be entitled to service connection for conditions related to that exposure.

Some items to note:

- The law takes effect January 1, 2020.
- Veterans can file claims at any time, and they will be decided after the law is implemented.
- Blue Water Navy claims and appeals currently in process have been placed on hold (stayed) until the new rules go into effect.
- If veterans had an Agent Orange claim with one or more presumptive conditions denied in the past, you are urged to file a new claim. Claims that are currently in the VA review process or under appeal will be reviewed under the new policy.
- Eligible survivors of deceased Blue Water Navy Veterans also may benefit from this new law and may file claims for benefits based on the veterans' service.
- Veterans should provide the name(s) of the ship(s) and the date(s) they crossed within 12 nautical miles of the Republic of Vietnam.
- Veterans should provide medical evidence showing a diagnosis of a current Agent Orange presumptive condition.

I encourage all veterans, and their families, to visit their respective county or tribal veterans service officer. We have posted a link on our website to assist you in locating the VSO located nearest you: <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/veteransserviceofficers/locatevso.aspx>.

As always, our staff in our Sioux Falls Claims Office stands ready to assist veterans with their claims. Our office is located on the Sioux Falls VA Healthcare System campus – Building 38 (right off 22nd Street) or give us a call at 605.333.6869.

Greg Whitlock, Secretary
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs