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SDDVA Secretary Whitlock's January Column – Veterans Should Register in the Burn Pit Registry

Typically, when we hear the word “registry” we think of a gift registry for weddings, showers, births, graduations, and anniversaries. But there is another kind of registry veterans need to be aware of.

The VA Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry is available to eligible veterans and service members to document their exposures and report health concerns through an online questionnaire.

Eligible veterans and service members include those who served in:

- Southwest Asia theater of operations on or after August 2, 1990
- Operations Desert Shield or Desert Storm
- Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn
- Djibouti, Africa on or after September 11, 2001.

The use of open burn pits was a common waste disposal practice at military sites outside of the U.S., such as in Iraq and Afghanistan. Airborne hazards like smoke, and other emissions, from these pits contained an unknown mixture of substances that may have short and long-term health effects, especially for individuals who were exposed for longer periods or those with pre-existing conditions such as asthma or other lung or heart conditions.

At year-end, South Dakota only had 899 veterans and service members who completed and submitted the registry.

This registry allows veterans to become more aware of their own health and to help identify health conditions possibly related to burn pit exposure or other airborne hazards during military service.

What veterans should know:

- There's no cost to participate
- Participation is not required for other VA benefits such as disability compensation
- Enrollment in VA health care is not required
- It takes about 40 minutes to complete the questionnaire
- Veterans can do it in one sitting or save it and come back later

- Veterans can print and use the completed questionnaire to discuss concerns with their healthcare providers.

Veterans can access the registry at:

<https://veteran.mobilehealth.va.gov/AHBurnPitRegistry/#page/home>

Much like Agent Orange, many health effects to chemical exposure are not diagnosed or determined until well after exposure when scientific studies are completed. Participation contributes to research on airborne hazards and health, which helps improve the quality of care for all veterans. The more information the VA and Congress have, the easier it will be to secure medical assistance.

As always, our staff is available to assist you and/or answer any questions (605.333.6869).

To all the men and women who have served our country, thank you.

Greg Whitlock, Secretary
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs