

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

# 10 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT BURN PITS



In June 2014, VA launched the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry in response to concerns that Veterans were experiencing a range of respiratory illnesses possibly associated with exposure to burn pits. The registry is open to many Veterans and active-duty Servicemembers who deployed to various locations. This fact sheet describes why you should participate in the registry and how it might help uncover links between exposures and certain health conditions.

## 1. EXPOSURE TO BURN PITS WAS COMMON AMONG SERVICEMEMBERS OVERSEAS AND MAY HAVE HEALTH EFFECTS.

A burn pit is an area devoted to open-air combustion of trash. The use of burn pits was a common waste disposal practice at military sites outside the United States, such as in Iraq and Afghanistan. Smoke from these pits contained substances that may have short- and long-term health effects, especially for those who were exposed for long periods or those more prone to illness such as individuals with pre-existing asthma or other lung or heart conditions.

Waste products in burn pits include, but are not limited to: chemicals, paint, medical and human waste, metal/aluminum cans, munitions and other unexploded ordnance, petroleum and lubricant products, plastics and Styrofoam, rubber, wood, and discarded food. Burning waste in pits can create more hazards compared to controlled high-temperature burning—like in a commercial incinerator.

Toxins in burn pit smoke may affect the skin, eyes, respiratory and cardiovascular systems, gastrointestinal tract and internal organs.

Most of the irritation is temporary and resolves once the exposure is gone. This includes eye irritation and burning, coughing and throat irritation, breathing difficulties, and skin itching and rashes.



## 2. RESEARCH ON THE HEALTH EFFECTS OF BURN PIT EXPOSURES SPECIFIC TO VETERANS AND SERVICEMEMBERS IS LIMITED CURRENTLY.

At this time, there is conflicting and insufficient research to show that long-term health problems have resulted from burn pit exposure. VA continues to study the health of exposed Veterans. The registry is just one of several research projects currently underway.

The high level of fine dust and pollution common in Iraq and Afghanistan may pose a greater danger for respiratory illnesses than exposure to burn pits, according to a 2011 Institute of Medicine report.



### 3. REGISTRY PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY.

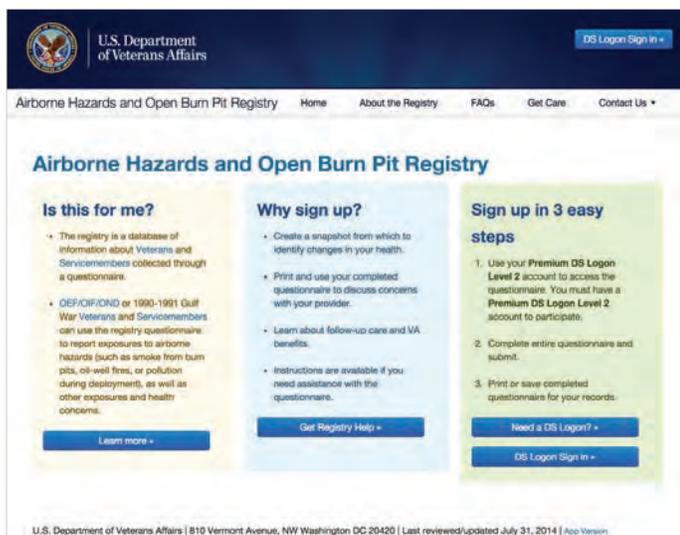
The Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry is a database of information about Veterans and Servicemembers. Participation in the registry is voluntary and will not affect access to VA health care or compensation benefits. Veterans and Servicemembers can use the registry questionnaire to report exposures to airborne hazards (such as smoke from burn pits, oil-well fires, or pollution during deployment), as well as other exposures and health concerns.

### 4. THE BURN PIT REGISTRY IS A HELPFUL TOOL FOR VETERANS AND RESEARCHERS.

The registry helps participants to become more aware of their health, while helping researchers to study the health effects of burn pits and other airborne hazards (e.g., sand, dust, and particulates). The online questionnaire can be used to identify health concerns, guide discussions with a health care provider and document deployment-related exposures.

Most Veterans and Servicemembers will complete the questionnaire just once. Some participants may be asked to participate in additional studies that could involve additional questionnaires and exams.

VA will maintain the security of all information provided in the registry.



### 5. MANY VETERANS WHO DEPLOYED AFTER 1990 CAN JOIN THE REGISTRY.

VA will determine eligibility for the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry based on deployment information from the Department of Defense (DoD). To be eligible, you must be a Veteran or Servicemember who deployed to contingency operations in the Southwest Asia theater of operations at any time on or after August 2, 1990 (as defined in 38 CFR 3.317(e) (2)), or Afghanistan or Djibouti on or after September 11, 2001. These regions include the following countries, bodies of water, and the airspace above these locations:

- » Iraq
- » Afghanistan
- » Kuwait
- » Saudi Arabia
- » Bahrain
- » Djibouti
- » Gulf of Aden
- » Gulf of Oman
- » Oman
- » Qatar
- » United Arab Emirates
- » Waters of the Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, and Red Sea

### 6. YOU NEED A DOD SELF-SERVICE LOGON LEVEL 2 ACCOUNT TO PARTICIPATE.

You may participate in the registry by completing a web-based health questionnaire at [veteran.mobilehealth.va.gov/AHBurnPitRegistry](http://veteran.mobilehealth.va.gov/AHBurnPitRegistry). To access the questionnaire, you will need your Department of Defense Self-Service Level 2 logon (DS-Logon). You may apply for a DS-Logon account at [www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dsaccess](http://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dsaccess) if you do not already have one. The DS-Logon is a secure, self-service identification that allows active-duty Servicemembers and Veterans to access several websites using a single username and password.

### 7. YOU CAN SIGN UP FOR THE BURN PIT REGISTRY IN THREE EASY STEPS.

Just head here: [veteran.mobilehealth.va.gov/AHBurnPitRegistry/#page/home](http://veteran.mobilehealth.va.gov/AHBurnPitRegistry/#page/home).

**Step 1:** Check your eligibility.

**Step 2:** Complete and submit the online questionnaire.

**Step 3:** Print and save your completed questionnaire for your records.

Veterans who are eligible for the registry are also eligible to obtain an optional no-cost, in-person medical evaluation (note this is not a disability examination).



## 8. TECHNICAL SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE FOR THE REGISTRY.

If you are having any problems with registering, you can call the Registry Help Desk from 8 am–8 pm Eastern Time at 1-877-470-5947. Additional help can be found within the Registry Frequently Asked Questions at [veteran.mobilehealth.va.gov/AHBurnPitRegistry/index.html#page/faq](http://veteran.mobilehealth.va.gov/AHBurnPitRegistry/index.html#page/faq).

## 9. HELP IS ALREADY AVAILABLE FOR HEALTH ISSUES AT VA.

Medical professionals with expertise in military exposures and health care benefits are available at VA medical centers nationwide. Veterans who are already enrolled in VA health care should talk to their primary care provider. Veterans who are not already enrolled should talk to an Environmental Health Coordinator at the nearest VA medical center. Find a local Environmental Health Coordinator by visiting [www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp) or calling 1-877-222-8387. Servicemembers should discuss any concerns or health issues with their health care provider.

## 10. YOU CAN FILE A CLAIM RELATED TO HEALTH PROBLEMS BELIEVED TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH BURN PITS.

Veterans may file a claim for disability compensation for health problems they believe are related to exposure to burn pits during military service. VA decides these claims on a case-by-case basis. File a claim online at [www.ebenefits.va.gov](http://www.ebenefits.va.gov).

For more information about burn pits and burn pit research head here: [www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/burnpits/index.asp](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/burnpits/index.asp)

For more information about the Burn Pit Registry head here: [veteran.mobilehealth.va.gov/AHBurnPitRegistry/index.html#page/about](http://veteran.mobilehealth.va.gov/AHBurnPitRegistry/index.html#page/about)

## ★ DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS' ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS

The Veterans Health Administration maintains the Environmental Health Program with a designated Environmental Health Coordinator and Clinician at each VA medical center. Some of these clinicians may be able to provide additional information about exposure concerns or deployment-related health issues. See a listing of Environmental Health Coordinators by facility at [www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp).



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