



# TOXIC EXPOSURES

Exposure to toxic substances during military service is a major health concern for post-9/11 veterans. Thousands who were exposed to burn pits and other environmental hazards are now suffering from rare respiratory conditions, cancers, and other serious illnesses. Unfortunately, many are unable to access care because they cannot prove service connection as these conditions often do not manifest until years after discharge. Congress must grant health care eligibility and improve the disability benefits process for all veterans who served in areas of known toxic exposures.

## WHAT ARE TOXIC EXPOSURES?

**Burn pits** are military sites dedicated to the open-air combustion of trash that were commonly used in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Common items disposed of in burn pits include fuel, munitions, plastics, paint, and medical and human waste.

Over multiple deployments, many veterans also suffered long-term exposure to desert sands, vehicle fumes, depleted uranium, and other hazardous chemicals.

## WHO IS IMPACTED?

Exposure to contaminants or other environmental hazards has emerged as a major health issue for post-9/11 veterans.

Approximately 3.5 million post-9/11 veterans may have been exposed to toxic substances during overseas deployments.\*

More than 200,000 veterans are enrolled in Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Burn Pit Registry – all of whom served on or after 9/11 and were deployed to a base or station where open burn pits were used.\*

\*VA

## WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT EFFORTS TO SUPPORT VETERANS AFFECTED BY TOXIC EXPOSURE

In conjunction with the work being done by Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) and its coalition partners, Congress is taking meaningful action to address these issues, particularly in the form of the toxic exposure omnibus bill: **Honoring our PACT Act**, introduced by Representative Mark Takano. The intent of **H.R.3967, Honoring our PACT Act**, is to recognize and establish the federal government's responsibility to provide health care and disability compensation to veterans fighting the effects of toxic exposure connected to their military service.

### TAKE ACTION

### WWP ENCOURAGES CONGRESS TO:

#### Support the Honoring Our PACT Act to:

- 1 Grant VA health care enrollment eligibility to any veteran who suffered toxic exposures while in service regardless of their service-connected disability claim status.
- 2 Create a list of presumptive disabilities for veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances.
- 3 Concede exposure to burn pits and other airborne hazards for veterans who served in areas where they were known to be used.
- 4 Ensure VA adopts a framework to establish new presumptive disabilities in a timely manner based on scientific data.
- 5 Develop a training module to ensure VA providers and benefits personnel can properly identify, treat, and assess the impact of illnesses related to toxic exposures.
- 6 Require a toxic exposure questionnaire at the beginning of every VA primary care appointment.