

The Toxic Exposure in the American Military (TEAM) Act

S.927/H.R.2127



WHY IS THIS BILL NECESSARY?

Exposure to contaminants and other environmental hazards is emerging as a major health issue for post-9/11 veterans. Those exposed have developed cancers, autoimmune disorders, skin diseases, respiratory illnesses, and other conditions. More than 200,000 veterans who served on or after 9/11 and were deployed to a base or station where open burn pits were used, are enrolled in the VA's Burn Pit Registry. And it's not just burn pits causing these illnesses and injuries – some who have fallen ill have reported being exposed to chemicals found in fire-fighting fluids, depleted uranium shells, engine fumes, and more.

For those seeking treatment, the largest barrier to VA health care is establishing service connection – an exceedingly difficult task when it comes to toxic exposure claims. Unfortunately, post-9/11 combat veterans with no service-connected disability lose eligibility for VA care 5 years after discharge; those who are already sick lose access to treatment, and those who are concerned about their exposures lose access to preventative care. Additionally, no permanent framework exists requiring the establishment of presumptive service connection when the scientific evidence points to an association between toxic exposures and veterans' illnesses.

WHAT DOES THE BILL DO?

- Grants permanent VA health care enrollment eligibility to ALL veterans who suffered toxic exposures while in service, regardless of their service-connected disability claim status, now and in the future.
- Establishes an independent commission to collect data, hold public meetings, and advise VA on toxic exposure related issues.
- Creates a framework that requires VA to respond to scientific data and establish presumptive service connection in a timely manner when there is credible evidence of association between toxic exposures and illnesses, regardless of era or location of service.
- Mandates additional training to ensure VA providers are able to properly identify, treat, and assess the impact of illnesses related to toxic exposures and requires a toxic exposure questionnaire at the beginning of every VA primary care appointment.

THE TEAM ACT IS GROUNDBREAKING

Historically, Congress has addressed military toxic exposures with separate legislation that addresses each one conflict by conflict, exposure by exposure.

The intent of the TEAM Act is to extend on a permanent basis two important components of any comprehensive toxic exposure legislation: health care eligibility and a scientific framework; to apply to ALL toxic exposures, regardless of era or location, foreign or domestic, now and in the future.

While the TEAM Act does not and cannot address all toxic exposure concerns for any one era now or in the future, it does finally ensure that the next generation of veterans who are exposed to toxic substances are not once again starting from square one like each generation before them.

PLEASE SUPPORT THE TEAM ACT TO IMPROVE HEALTH CARE AND BENEFITS FOR ALL VETERANS WHO SUFFERED TOXIC EXPOSURES, NOW AND IN THE FUTURE.