

VA Is Ready to Implement Veterans' Toxic Exposure Act

Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough issued a statement after a comprehensive veterans' toxic exposure bill known as the Honoring Our PACT Act (P.L. 117-68) was signed into law.

"We at VA are ready to implement the PACT Act and deliver for toxic-exposed Veterans and their survivors," McDonough wrote. "Thank you to all of the Veterans, survivors and family members who fought tirelessly to make this day possible, and thank you to President Biden for keeping our nation's promise to those who served."

McDonough noted that those who think they might be eligible for PACT Act benefits can file a claim with the VA now to apply for those benefits. He also stated that the 23 respiratory illnesses and cancers named in the bill were added to the presumptive conditions list the day the bill was signed.

Although the VA is encouraging eligible veterans and survivors to apply now, it should be noted that due to the time it will take to obtain funding approval and set up the processing infrastructure, the VA's website states that it does not plan to begin processing PACT Act-related claims until January 2023. According

to the website, this delay will "likely" be offset by backdating benefits to the date of the PACT Act's signing, Aug. 10.

The FRA-supported PACT Act establishes a presumption of service connection for 23 respiratory illnesses and cancers related to the inhalation of smoke from burn pits. Further, the law provides new benefits for veterans who faced radiation exposure during deployments throughout the Cold War. It also adds hypertension and monoclonal gammopathy to the list of illnesses linked to Agent Orange exposure during the Vietnam War, expands the eligibility timeline for Gulf War medical claims, and requires new medical exams for all veterans with toxic exposure claims. Additionally, veterans who served in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, American Samoa, the Johnston Atoll and Guam during the Vietnam War era are now covered under the same Agent Orange presumptive condition policies as those who served in Vietnam itself.

Shipmates can learn more about the PACT Act, including eligibility criteria and the application process, by going to: www.VA.gov/PACT or calling 1-800-MyVA411.