

Unaddressed Toxic Exposures

The VFW's Concern:

Congress must vigorously monitor Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) compliance with the *Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act of 2022*, commonly called the PACT Act, to ensure the continuous review of new presumptive conditions related to toxic exposures. The law directs VA to announce in the Federal Register, at least annually, its selections of military environmental exposures and adverse health outcomes for formal evaluation, informed by the established research working group. Subsequent public comments, input from Veterans Service Organizations, and information compiled by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine should assist VA in its evaluation of new presumptive conditions for service connection.

While the PACT Act included a list of conditions associated with exposure to particulate matter and herbicides, since the law's enactment veterans have informed the VFW they have other conditions related to toxic exposures during their time in service. These include but are not limited to uranium exposure at the Karshi-Khanabad (K2) Air Base in Uzbekistan; incidents of reproductive issues and other health conditions related to water contamination at Fort McClellan, Alabama; reports of higher rates of cancer among military pilots; and conditions associated with nuclear testing and waste cleanup. Veterans have reported exposure to firefighting foam and other materials exposing them to per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). There has been concern about the impact of the water contamination from the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii. The VFW has even had veterans report anomalous health incidents (Havana Syndrome), radiological exposures, and the use of burn pits in locations not currently covered by the PACT Act. These highlight the need for VA to comply with the law to ensure it has a functional and transparent presumptive process.

The VFW urges Congress to:

Require VA to publicly post announcements, updates, and current statuses of research pertaining to presumptive conditions from service-connected exposures.

Conduct oversight hearings to ensure VA's compliance with the PACT Act for the ongoing evaluation of conditions associated with toxic exposures.