

VA extends Agent Orange presumption to 'Blue Water Navy' Veterans

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is preparing to process Agent Orange exposure claims for "Blue Water Navy" Veterans who served offshore of the Republic of Vietnam between Jan. 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975.

These Veterans may be eligible for presumption of herbicide exposure through Public Law 116-23, Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019, which was signed into law June 25, 2019, and goes into effect Jan. 1, 2020. They may also qualify for a presumption of service connection if they have a disease that is recognized as being associated with herbicide exposure.

The bipartisan Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act gives VA until Jan. 1, 2020, to begin deciding Blue Water Navy related claims. By staying claims decisions until that date, VA is complying with the law that Congress wrote and passed.

Blue Water Navy Veterans are encouraged to submit disability compensation claims for conditions presumed to be related to Agent Orange exposure. Veterans over age 85 or with life-threatening illnesses will have priority in claims processing.

Veterans who previously were denied for an Agent Orange related presumptive condition can file a new claim based on the change in law. Eligible survivors of deceased Blue Water Navy Veterans also may benefit from the new law and may file claims for benefits based on the Veterans' service.

The new law affects Veterans who served on a vessel operating not more than 12 nautical miles seaward from the demarcation line of the waters of Vietnam and Cambodia, as defined in Public Law 116-23. An estimated 420,000 to 560,000 Vietnam-era Veterans may be considered Blue Water Navy Veterans.

For more information about Agent Orange exposure in Vietnam waters (Blue Water Navy Veterans), visit <https://www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/hazardous-materials-exposure/agent-orange/vietnam-waters/>. In addition, Veterans could contact their Veterans Service Officer or VA's toll-free number at 800-827-1000.