

VHA Support of Atomic Veterans and Other Veterans Exposed to Ionizing Radiation



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DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

**OFFICE OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND
ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS**

PRINCIPLES

Presumptive Diagnoses

- Leukemia and Lymphomas
 - Excludes CLL
 - Excludes Hodgkin's Disease
 - Includes Multiple Myeloma
- Solid Tumors
 - Thyroid
 - Breast
 - Pharynx
 - Esophagus
 - Stomach and small intestine
 - Pancreas and Gall bladder including bile duct
 - Liver cancer (except if cirrhosis or hepatitis B or C)
 - Salivary glands
 - Urinary tract (excludes genitalia)
- 3/26/02: 5 additional cancers added
 - Brain, Bone, Lung, Colon, & Ovary

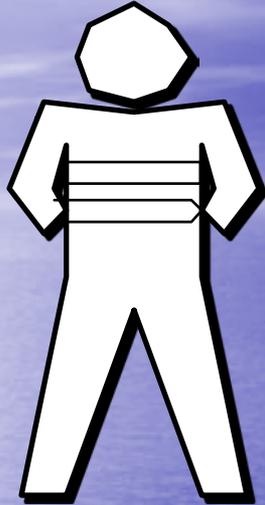
PRINCIPLES

Public Law 98-542 10/24/84

- Establish guidelines for resolving claims
- Establish Veterans' Advisory Committee on Environmental Hazards
- Secretary of Defense to prescribe guidelines for preparation of radiation dose estimates
- Establish process for independent dose estimate
- 38 CFR 3.311

PROCESS

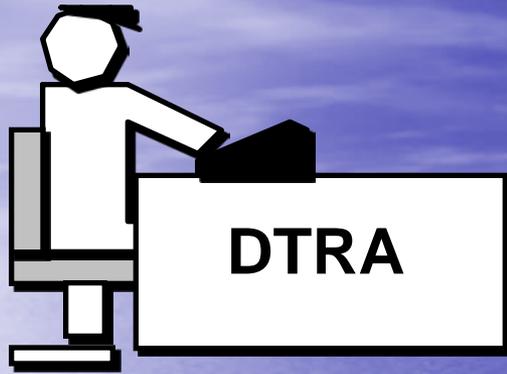
- Presumptive Diagnosis
 - Establish participation
 - Medical evidence of diagnosis
 - Handled at Jackson, MS VA Regional Office (VARO)
- Non-Presumptive
 - 38 CFR 3.311
 - All cancers included
 - Some non-cancerous conditions included
 - Any disability or disease may be considered if supported by medical or scientific evidence



**Veteran files claim with the VA
Regional Office (VARO) of the
Veterans Benefits
Administration (VBA) serving
his/her area
All Radiation related claims are
forwarded to Jackson, MS VARO**

**Jackson requests
documentation of
participation and dose
from DTRA**





DTRA researches case and responds by letter to Jackson MS VARO with a copy to the veteran when his/her mailing address is known

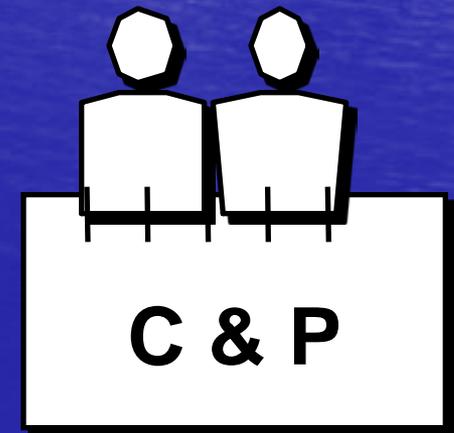


If DTRA confirms participation and provides a positive dose estimate, VARO submits case to Compensation and Pension (C&P) Service of the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) in VA Central Office (VACO), Washington, DC for an advisory opinion

**VHA OPHEH returns case
with a medical opinion to the
C&P Service**



**C&P Service refers the case to the
Veterans Health Administration
(VHA) Office of Public Health and
Environmental Hazards (OPHEH)
for a medical opinion on the
likelihood that radiation was
responsible**

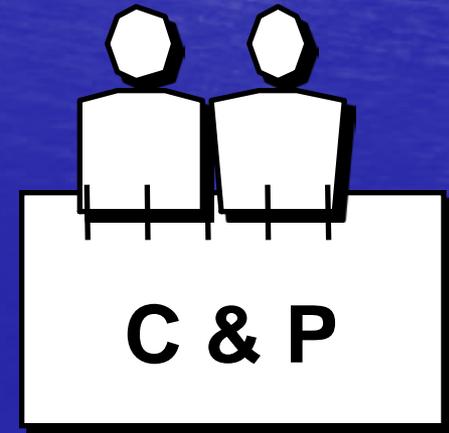




**VARO makes
compensation
decision and
informs
veteran**



**C&P Service reviews the
medical opinion and
returns case to the VARO
with an advisory opinion**



PROCESS

Medical Opinion

- VHA Central Office, Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards
 - Director Radiation and Physical Exposures
 - Health Physicist
- NIOSH Interactive Radio-Epidemiologic Program
 - 99% Confidence Interval that it is as likely as not
 - Used for cancers only
 - https://www.niosh-irep.com/irep_niosh/
- Non-cancers or those not considered radiogenic
- No dose estimate available

PROCESS

- *Skin cancers* – need specific site(s)
- *Throat cancer* – need specific organ
- *Cataracts* – only one specific type is on the radiogenic list—any other kind requires existence of medical evidence
- *Tumors* – need specific site and evidence of malignancy or radiogenicity (except for brain and central nervous system)
- *Cancers* – need target organ if not obvious from disease type and classification

PROCESS

Determining Radiation Exposure

- DD1141 forms
- Veteran's service and medical records
- Dosimetry offices
- Department of Energy
- Individual nuclear weapons facilities
- Projects - Hanford
- Air Force: Technical Applications Center

PROCESS

Determining Actual Diagnosis

- Hospital discharge summaries
- Operative reports
- Sub-specialty consultations
- Pathology reports
- Death certificate

PROCESS

Determining Service Connection

- Veteran's service and medical record
- Medical reports since leaving active duty
- Professional references
 - International Agency for Research on Cancer manuals
 - Biologic Effects of Ionizing Radiation reports
 - Oncology/ medical texts
 - Subject matter expert consultation
 - Literature review
- Other possible reasons for service connection

Ionizing Radiation Registry

- October 28 1986 – Public Law 99-576
- Onsite participation in nuclear testing
- Participation in the occupation of Hiroshima/Nagasaki
- Internment as prisoner of war in Japan which resulted in an opportunity
- Other radiation risk activity

Ionizing Radiation Registry

Naso-pharyngeal radium

- November 11, 1998 – Public Law 105-398
- Medical examination
- Hospital care
- Medical services
- Nursing home care

Ionizing Radiation Registry

- Enrollment in registry program
 - Health Eligibility Center
 - DTRA confirms
- Medical Examination
- Receives Letter with finding
- Follow-up examinations also available
- Receives updates through periodic mailings
- Possible Priority 6 enrollment

Resources

- Victoria Cassano, MD, MPH
 - Victoria.Cassano@va.gov
 - 202-461-1024
- Ionizing radiation registry
 - Helen.Malaskiewicz@va.gov
 - 202-461-1020
- Our Website is being upgraded
 - <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/radiation/index.asp>