

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office
St. Petersburg, FL

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The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete.

THE AMERICAN RECOVERY AND REINVESTMENT ACT OF 2009 was signed by the President on February 17, 2009. This Act provides for the one-time payment from the U.S. Treasury of \$250.00 to individuals receiving Supplemental Security Income or adults receiving Social Security benefits, VA compensation and pension benefits, and Railroad Retirement benefits. An individual shall be paid only one payment under this law, regardless of whether the individual is entitled to, or eligible for, more than one benefit or cash payment described above.

It is anticipated that the \$250.00 payment will be issued in June 2009. No action will be needed by eligible persons to receive this one-time payment. The payment will be issued separately and it will not be included in regular compensation and pension benefit payments. The payment will be made in the same way as current VA benefit payments, whether by direct deposit or mail.

VA IMPLEMENTING NATIONAL SAFETY "STEP-UP" (VA News Release) WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is calling for a special training campaign on safety – called a "Step-Up" – from March 8 to 14 at all medical centers and outpatient clinics to ensure VA staff follow the highest standards for patient safety.

The nationwide Step-Up is the culmination of a VA education program to implement stronger procedures and better accountability at VA health care facilities. The training was triggered by VA inspections that found reprocessing of endoscopic equipment did not follow the manufacturer's exact instructions at two VA medical centers. The facilities -- located in Murfreesboro, Tenn., and Augusta, Ga. -- have already taken corrective action.

VA officials are not aware of any patients having been harmed by improperly reprocessed equipment. Although risks are small, the department is being very conservative and notifying patients who might have been treated by the affected equipment.

Normal activities will continue during the Step-Up at all VA facilities, but with extra emphasis on safety and proper

processing protocols. Specific efforts will include retraining on reprocessing endoscopes, establishment of easily-tracked accountability for instrument processing, and training on standard operating procedures by facility leadership.

Patient appointments should not be affected, but individual facilities will notify patients if schedule changes are necessary.

CAMP LEJEUNE WATER CONTAMINATION (Veterans Health Administration Fact Sheet) The Department of the Navy has recently initiated a mail campaign to notify veterans stationed at the "Camp Lejeune" Marine Corps Base in North Carolina of toxic chemicals in the drinking water between 1957 and 1987. The letter invites service members and their families to participate in a registry of who may have consumed contaminated drinking water during that period.

The following solvents were found in the drinking water at Camp Lejeune Base: Perchloroethylene or Tetrachloroethylene, from an off-base dry cleaning firm; Trichloroethylene, from leaking underground storage tanks and past disposal practices.

It is not clear, at this time, that any of the military service members or their families were exposed to chemicals in drinking water at levels that would cause health problems.

There are currently no health screenings or health benefits associated with this potential exposure. However, veterans who may have been exposed are encouraged to apply for enrollment, and if enrolled, should discuss any specific concerns with their VA healthcare provider.

VA providers may direct concerned veterans to VHA Environmental Health program staff located at each medical center. These staff can offer informed discussions and answer health-related exposure questions.

Veterans who received the letter from the Department of the Navy may visit the following websites for the most

current updates:

<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/sites/lejeune/index.html>

www.marines.mil/clsurvey/index.html

For more information, call the Department of Navy toll-free at (877) 261-9782.

DEATHS ON ACTIVE DUTY – SURVIVORS BENEFITS

(VA Fact Sheet) VA has a variety of programs to assist the survivors of military personnel who die on active duty. Most of these provisions apply equally to those serving on active duty inside or outside a combat theater. When a member of the Reserves or National Guard dies while federally activated or when serving on inactive duty for training, the death is considered service-connected for VA death benefits. Activation of a National Guard unit by a governor alone in support of security operations does not qualify unit members for these VA benefits, except life insurance.

Survivors receive certain payments or benefits regardless of whether the in-service death is due to combat, accident or disease, including:

Burial benefits for the deceased servicemember, which include a gravesite in any VA national cemetery with available space, perpetual care of the grave at no cost to the family, a government headstone or marker, Presidential Memorial Certificate, and a U.S. burial flag.

Dependency and Indemnity Compensation at the current basic monthly rate of \$1,154 for a surviving spouse, with additional benefits for dependent children.

Life insurance, which most military members carry at the highest level, \$400,000.

When a servicemember dies on active duty, VA's **Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program** generally provides up to 45 months of education benefits to the un-remarried surviving spouse, or for children aged 18 to 26. More information is available at http://www.gibill.va.gov/pamphlets/CH35/CH35_Pamphlet_General.htm.

VA has a **Casualty Assistance Program** to give personal attention to surviving family members after in-service deaths, and to help them with benefit information and applications. A casualty assistance coordinator is designated at each VA Regional Office. These VA coordinators work closely with military casualty officers to ensure timely assistance to beneficiaries.

VA offers **bereavement counseling** to parents, spouses and children of Armed Forces personnel who died in the service of their country. Bereavement counseling helps people deal with emotional and psychological stress after the death of a loved one. VA's bereavement counseling is provided at community-based Vet Centers located near the families. A directory is available at <http://www.va.gov/directory/guide/vetcenter.asp>. There is no cost for VA bereavement counseling.

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

SUICIDE PREVENTION 1-800-273-8255

VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 1-800-827-1000

Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022 1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)
Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications 1-877-823-2378

VA EFT Information Hotline (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) 1-877-838-2778

Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline (medical care) - 1-877-222-8387

VA Health Revenue Service (information on amounts owed to VA Medical Centers) 1-866-793-4591

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 1-800-669-8477

VA Health Administration Center (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -

CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023

CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024
Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 1-800-733-8387

National Cemeteries

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL 727-398-9426
6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 33513 352-793-7740
6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 33467 561-649-6489
4083 Lannie Rd, Jacksonville FL 32218 904-358-3510
Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL 850-453-4108/4846
9810 State Hwy 72, Sarasota FL 877-861-9840

National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs (headstones and markers) - 5109 Russell Rd Quantico VA 22134-3903 1-800-697-6947

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120 1-888-244-6711

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit - Chicago VA Regional Office 1-800-829-4833

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: www.va.gov

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) www.warms.vba.va.gov

St. Petersburg VA Regional Office:

www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete

Property Management (sale of VA-repossessed homes): www.ocwen.com

Federal employment: www.usajobs.opm.gov

Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs: www.floridavets.org

"Florida Vets First:" www.FloridaVetsFirst.com

Library of Congress (information on pending legislation) thomas.loc.gov