

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 <http://www.benefits.va.gov/stpetersburg/>.

VA PUBLISHES FINAL REGULATION TO AID VETERANS EXPOSED TO AGENT ORANGE IN KOREA

(VA News Release) WASHINGTON –Under a final regulation published in the Federal Register, VA will presume herbicide exposure for any veteran who served between April 1, 1968, and August 31, 1971, in a unit determined by VA and the Department of Defense (DoD) to have operated in an area in or near the Korean DMZ in which herbicides were applied. Previously, VA recognized that Agent Orange exposure could only be conceded to veterans who served in certain units along the Korean DMZ between April 1968 and July 1969.

In practical terms, eligible veterans who have specific illnesses VA presumes to be associated with herbicide exposure do not have to prove an association between their illness and their military service. This "presumption" simplifies and speeds up the application process for benefits and ensures that veterans receive the benefits they deserve.

Information about veterans' diseases associated with Agent Orange exposure is available at <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/diseases.asp>. Information about birth defects in children of Vietnam and Korea veterans can be found at http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/birth_defects.asp.

VA encourages veterans with covered service in Korea who have medical conditions that may be related to Agent Orange to submit their applications for access to VA health care and compensation as soon as possible so the agency can begin processing their claims. Individuals can go to website <http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/AO/claimherbicide.htm> to get a more complete understanding of how to file a claim as well as what evidence is needed by VA to make a decision about disability compensation or survivors benefits.

Additional information about Agent Orange and VA's services for veterans exposed to the chemical is available at www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange.

VA ADDS CHAT FEATURE TO ONLINE APPLICATION FOR HEALTH BENEFITS (VA News Release)

WASHINGTON – Veterans will find it easier and faster to apply for their health care benefits now that the Department of veterans Affairs has enhanced and streamlined its online Form 10-10EZ, "Application for Health Benefits." This revised online application now features a chat function which will allow veterans to receive live assistance while they are filling out the form. Additional enhancements to the process include simplification of questions relating to military service in Southeast Asia during the Gulf and in the Vietnam wars. Several additional minor enhancements make the application easier and faster for veterans to complete.

The 10-10EZ application is divided into six different sets of information, including personal information, insurance information, employment, military service, and a financial assessment. Since November 2000, nearly 400,000 veterans have already used the online 10-10EZ to start receiving health care benefits from VA.

Future enhancements to the online application will include a 10-10 EZR Health Benefits Renewal Form for veterans to update their personal information and a special 10-10EZ designed specifically for demobilizing military service members.

Veterans may complete or download the 10-10EZ form at the VA health eligibility Web site at www.1010ez.med.va.gov/sec/vha/1010ez.

Veterans may also contact VA at 1 (877) 222-8387 (VETS), visit the VA health eligibility Web site at www.va.gov/healtheligibility or apply for health care benefits at any VA medical center at <http://www2.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp> with the help of a VA health care eligibility specialist.

VA URGES VETERANS TO SIGN UP FOR DIRECT DEPOSITS (VA News Release) WASHINGTON - The

Department of the Treasury announced a new rule that will extend the safety and convenience of electronic payments

to millions of Americans and phase out paper checks for federal benefits by March 1, 2013. Officials at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) urge veterans to sign up for electronic payment of their benefits.

On March 1, 2013, VA will stop issuing paper checks. People who do not have electronic payments for their federal benefits by that time will receive their funds via a pre-paid debit card. Called the Direct Express card, it is issued by Comerica Bank as the financial agent of the U.S. Treasury. Another deadline affects people receiving VA compensation or pension benefits for the first time after May 1, 2011. Those people will automatically receive the benefits electronically.

Anyone already receiving federal benefit payments electronically will be unaffected by the changes. To learn more about the federal government's switch to direct deposit – or to change VA benefits to direct deposit - visit www.GoDirect.org. Information about the federal government's "Go Direct" campaign is also available at 1-800-333-1795.

Along with payments for VA benefit, the change will also affect recipients of payments from Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, Railroad Retirement Board, or Office of Personnel Management.

IMPROVEMENTS TO POST-9/11 GI BILL SIGNED INTO

LAW (VA News Release) WASHINGTON – Legislation that streamlines the 18-month-old education program administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has been signed into law. Among the provisions of the legislation are:

- paying for on-the-job training, some flight training apprenticeship training and correspondence courses;
- allowing reservists and Guardsmen to have their time supporting emergencies called by their state governors credited to the time needed to qualify for educational benefits;
- providing one half of the national average for the program's housing allowance to students enrolled in distance learning;
- pro-rating the housing allowance to exclude payments when students are not in class;
- allowing students on active duty receive the stipend for books and supplies;
- allowing people eligible for the Post-9/11 GI Bill, but participating in VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) benefits to choose between the GI Bill's housing allowance or VR&E's subsistence allowance;
- permitting reimbursement for more than one "license and certification" test;
- reimbursing fees to take national admission tests, such as SAT, ACT, GMAT and LSAT;
- establishing a national cap of \$17,500 annually for tuition and fees in a private or a foreign school, not including contributions by educational institutions under the "Yellow Ribbon" program.

More information is available www.gibill.va.gov.

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 352-793-7740

6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 561-649-6489

4083 Lannie Rd, Jacksonville FL 904-766-5222

Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL 850-453-4108/4846

9810 State Hwy 72, Sarasota FL 877-861-9840

104 Marine St, St Augustine FL 352-793-7740

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:

<http://www.benefits.va.gov/stpetersburg/>

Property Management (sale of VA-repossessed homes): <http://va.reotrans.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