

April 2019 TOXIC EXPOSURE COMMITTEE REPORT

Nadine Owen and Nancy Switzer

Agent Orange Strategy Meeting on December 4th & 5th, 2018 at VVA National Office in Silver Springs, MD

- Those in Attendance:

Cathy Wiblemo, Linda Schwartz, Nancy Switzer, Maynard Kaderlik, Sharon Hodge, Rick Wiedman, Bernie Edelman, Mokie Porter and Jack McManus.

- The goal is as follows:

4 letters to address Agent Orange and toxic issues

1. Letter to VA secretary regarding the five different health conditions of Vietnam Veterans and to address them and report out those that will be presumptive. The five are hyper-thyroidism, bladder cancer, Parkinson like conditions, hypertension, and Glioblastoma (added by NASEM on glioblastoma). Also, to ask the secretary how many Vietnam Veterans have this in the last 30 years.
2. Letter to VA secretary regarding birth defects and the VA to fund the more needed research. Also, to put together a press release on this issue. In addition, to set up a panel of experts to reinforce VVA's position on research for the descendants. Suggested names include, Christine Casper, Linda Birnbaum, George Knafl, and Richard Albanese. This panel to monitor and address progress on all issues of Law #114-315.
3. Letter to the Secretary of Defense or DOD regarding the Ranch Hand Study that is not done until analysis is completed. This study has roughly 86,000 samples. This should be done by using new technologies, diagnostic process regarding generational effects, and access to all original data. The storage site of these samples are in Randolph, Texas and Wright Patterson, Ohio which are both Air Force bases. Perhaps ask Senators Blumenthal and Moran to help us with this issue. When asked who would do the analysis, suggestions were of this committee Linda Birnbaum, Director of National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences. She could guide VVA on suggestions such as an independent. Linda Schwartz could take the lead on this issue.
4. Letter to the Secretary of Defense or DOD and press release on GAO (Government Accountability Office) in November 2018 and a report to the Congressional Addresses (Agent Orange). Action is needed to improve accuracy and communication of information on testing and storage locations, along with a letter of the action plan to proceed.

Other items that were discussed by the committee:

- Discussed holding an information session (with a box lunch) for the legislative aides who have veterans' affairs/issues in their portfolio of responsibilities of, initially, new members of the House, and all members of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee. This would be done sometime in February when the 116th Congress gets more organized.
- Blue Water Navy legislation, VVA to work with Congress to get the issue to the floor in the 116th Congress for a vote to pass the legislation.
- Discussed the future direction of town hall meetings. (T/H) Suggestions by VVA National that we direct them to be more general to Veterans health and benefit issues. Maynard Kaderlik to discuss more on this issue in detail.
- VA form # 21-0304 – discussion on this form

Blue Water Navy Update

The Veterans Affairs leaders will not recommend appealing a federal court ruling to award disability benefits to thousands of Vietnam veterans who claim exposure to cancer-causing chemical defoliants during ship deployments off that country's coastline, officials confirmed. Finally these veterans and their families will have justice served!!

We would really like to thank the board of directors for passing a motion donating \$3,000.00 to the Birth Defects Registry, it was greatly appreciated by Betty Mekdeci.

Saturday, March 23, 2019, Portland, Oregon VVA Chapter 392 had their 6th Agent Orange/Toxic Exposure Town Hall at the Portland VA Hospital. As with keeping with their professional persona, VVA Chapter 392 performed at an exceptional level of organizing, promoting and presenting all 6 of these town halls. Moderator Don Curtis, along with presenters Retired Sargent Major Ed Van Dyke, currently a Oregon Department Veteran's Service Officer, Donna Disch, Hazmat Scientist/Coordinator and Tom Owen, Special Advisor to the National Agent Orange Toxic Substance Committee, all presented relevant and informative information relating to the effects of Toxic Exposure, as well as, assistance in pursuing claims for the veteran and/or family member(s).

With approximately 115 attendees, audience participation was very high. Along with the sharing of frustrations with the current VA system, personal stories of how toxins have affected their lives and how to get to the next step, the audience walked away with current information relating to the VA system, toxic exposures, as well as, a point of contact to help navigate them.

Now, after being involved with 46 of these Agent Orange/Toxic Exposure meetings, it never ceases to amaze us that there are so many veterans that are still, for the most part, unaware of the consequences of their exposures.

Town Halls/presentations in the wings are as follows :

- 5-17-19 Community Center Dinner, Brownsville, Oregon
- TBA St. Charles Medical Center, Bend, Oregon
- TBA American Legion Post 51 Auxiliary, Lebanon, Oregon