

TOXIC EXPOSURE COMMITTEE REPORT
JUNE 2016

I am pleased to report that Region 8 Director, John Birch has instituted a new committee in Region 8, named the Pacific Northwest Toxic Exposure Education Committee. The goal is to educate and gain the support to pass the legislation at hand, S.901 and HR.1769. Nadine Owen is chair of this committee and John will be the co-chair. Tom Owen will be the VVA advisor, organizer and coordinator. Our panel will consist of past panel members Tom has worked with in the past. We will make contact through VVA/AVVA chapters, VFW/Legions and other organizations that want to participate. This is a joint effort between AVVA and VVA. I have asked John to give a report on what has transpired since April of this year.

John Birch Reports:

One of the hurdles to getting our toxic Substance Research Act passed has been to get the bills scored so they can be brought up for a floor vote. Prior to the April Board meeting I set up an appointment with Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid's office. On April 7th VVA's Director of Government Affairs Rick Weidman, joined Tom for a day on Capitol Hill. They met with Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid's Chief of Staff, General Bob Herbert, and Veterans Legislative Advisor, Brad Hatcher. The topics covered were Toxic Substance Research Act (S.901 and H.769), Blue Water Navy Exposure (S.681 and HR.969), and Doc's to Doctors (S.2279 and HR.4134. S-2279 was co-authored and introduced by Oregon Sen. Jeff Merkley.)

Gen. Herbert, two years ago, pledged to get some 11th hour Monsanto riders off the farm bill. He made it happen. At his meeting he pledged to work with the accounting office to get the bills scored and moved to the floor. Hopefully he will have the same success. We then focused on the Oregon legislators that have not yet signed on to H-1769 and met with senior staff and legislative advisors for each. The message delivered and request for action was the same at each meeting. Supported with stories from the Faces of Agent Orange and the devastating effects on our progeny, coupled with up to date data provided by Mr. Weidman, we asked for their support and sponsorship for our bills. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici, Rep. Kurt Schrader, Rep. Greg Walden, all Oregon Legislators have signed on to the Blue water Navy bill! Tom, received an email from Rep. Bonamici's office saying that she would sign on as a sponsor. Rep. Schrader's staffer said he had heard of the bill but knew little about it. I believe a barrage of phone calls and some letters to the editor in the newspapers in his district may be very helpful. Rep. Walden's legislative advisor asked for two weeks to do their work-up on the bill. Some letters to the editor in Mr. Walden's district along with phone calls to his DC, Bend, Ashland and Medford office and or letters to the editor in those cities, could help.

Tom attended a special meeting of the National VVA Agent Orange Toxic Substance committee where he followed through on an idea he presented to VVA Communications Dir. Mokie Porter, committee chairs Maynard Kaderlik, Nancy Switzer and Linda Mooney concerning a public awareness campaign about toxic exposures. One vehicle will be letters to the editor. Several letters have been written and approved by the committee and communications staff. They can be used as a guide to assist others in writing letters or just fill in the blanks, sign and send.

Since the start of this report two significant things have happened: 1) as of last week the congressional budget office has scored the bill, thanks to Rick Weidman, Sharon Hodge and General Herbert; 2) Tom has been advised by phone call that Congressman Walden's DC staff has completed their work up and this morning recommended to Mr. Walden that he co-sponsor H.1769.

On May 21st, Tom Owen and I were invited to Idaho State Council Meeting and we presented a 30 minute presentation and video stressing the importance of town hall meetings educating the veteran, the veteran family and the general public about the long term and generational effects of exposure to toxic substances. Region 8 committee members have also recently done presentations with civic leaders, medical professionals, and service clubs around the area.

Tom is the scheduled guest speaker at the meeting of the Central Oregon Veterans Council in July. Up-coming events: Planning stages for a 4 state educational road trip. Between Tom and myself, I can confirm I have spent dozens of hours Tom has committed tens of dozens of hours on this activity.

-End of Report. Great Job Region 8-

In March I was asked to come to Washington and meet with your representatives. I thank Carl Tuvin for making all of the appointments. Jack McManus and I traveled the halls and pounded on doors and we did have great success.

I was asked to be a speaker and attended the following Faces of Agent Orange Town Hall meetings: Virginia Beach, Virginia, Des Moines, Iowa, Cleveland, Georgia, Ponco, Oklahoma and soon will be at the Amarillo, Texas. All have graciously made it possible for me to attend.

Regarding S.901, the Toxic Exposure Research act of 2015, introduced by Senators Jerry Moran (KS) and Richard Blumenthal (CT), has been included in S2921, the Veterans First Act, under Title II, Subtitle I, "Research and Toxic Exposure." S. 2921 was introduced by Senators John Isakson (GA), Chairman, Richard Blumenthal (CT), and Ranking Member Senate Committee on Veterans' affairs. We all need your help in contacting your representative and continue to thank you for your Grassroots advocacy.

In closing, we have been working to add many articles on our web site. There is a new AVVA pamphlet, "Has Your Child's or Grandchild's Health Been Affected by Your Military Service?" This is a great tool for membership tables and we have been including them at our Town Hall Meeting.