

VIRTUAL PUBLIC SESSION

Committee to Reassess the Department of Veterans Affairs Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry

June 23, 2021

1:00pm to 3:30pm ET

Connect via Individual ZoomGov Links through Registration Here:

https://nas-sec.zoomgov.com/webinar/register/WN_y_g-QnaRS_2A529JvJepwQ

1:00–1:05pm Welcome and introductions; conduct of the open session

David Savitz, PhD, Committee Chair

1:05–2:00 World Trade Center Health Registry

Mark Farfel, ScD, Director New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene,

Accompanied by James Cone, MD, MPH Registry Medical Director and Robert Brackbill, PhD, MPH, Registry Research Director

2:00–2:30 Millennium Cohort Study

Rudy Rull PhD, MPH. PI Millennium Cohort Study, and

Ed Boyko, MD, MPH. VA Puget Sound, Director of VA's Seattle Epidemiologic Research and Information Center and Chair of VA Cooperative Study #505—The Millennium Cohort Study

2:30–3:30 VA Airborne Hazards & Burn Pit Center of Excellence

Michael Falvo, PhD, Co-Director of the VA Airborne Hazards and Burn Pits Center of Excellence, and

Nisha Jani, PhD, MPH, VA WRIISC Epidemiologist

3:30 OPEN SESSION ENDS

A NOTE TO ATTENDEES

This meeting is being held to gather information to help the committee conduct its study. This committee will examine the information and material obtained during this, and other public meetings, in an effort to inform its work. Although opinions may be stated and lively discussion may ensue, no conclusions are being drawn at this time, and the committee will deliberate thoroughly before writing its draft report. Moreover, once the draft report is written, it must go through a rigorous review by experts who are anonymous to the committee, and the committee then must respond to this review with appropriate revisions that adequately satisfy the Academies' Report Review Committee and the NAS president before it is considered an official Academies report. Therefore, observers who draw conclusions about the committee's work based on today's discussions will be doing so prematurely.

Furthermore, individual committee members often engage in discussion and questioning for the specific purpose of probing an issue and sharpening an argument. The comments of any committee member may not necessarily reflect the position he or she may actually hold on the subject under discussion, to say nothing of that person's future position as it may evolve in the course of the project. Any inference about an individual's position regarding findings or recommendations in the final report is therefore also premature.

SPEAKER BIOSKETCHES

Mark Farfel, ScD, has served as Director of the World Trade Center Health Registry, hosted by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene since July 2005. Prior to that, Dr. Farfel was a member of the faculty of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Department of Health Policy and Management, where he received his doctoral degree.

Robert Brackbill, PhD, MPH, is the Research Director of the WTC Health Registry. He is an epidemiologist and the founding principal investigator of the Registry beginning in 2002 when he was a CDC assignee to the New York City Health Department. Since then Dr. Brackbill has been a member of the Registry's senior leadership team.

James Cone, MD, MPH, is the Medical Director of the WTC Health Registry and member of the Registry's senior leadership team since joining the Registry in 2006. Dr. Cone is an occupational medicine physician and internist with experience in local, state, and federal government, and academia.

Rudy Rull, PhD, MPH, is a Research Epidemiologist at the Naval Health Research Center and the Principal Investigator of the Millennium Cohort Study, the largest longitudinal health study in US military history with over 240,000 enrolled participants. He directs an extensive portfolio of epidemiologic research focused on the long-term impacts of military service and deployments on the long-term physical health, psychological health, and quality of life of US service members and veterans. In addition to military health, Dr. Rull's research has focused on the assessment of environmental exposures to metals, pesticides, and other pollutants using biological markers, environmental databases, geographic information systems and mapping technologies, and the effects of these exposures on cancer, respiratory health, and birth defects. He received his PhD and MPH in Epidemiology from the University of California, Los Angeles and BA in Environmental Sciences from the University of California, Berkeley.

Edward Boyko, MD, MPH, is a staff physician at VA Puget Sound Health Care System in Seattle where he has worked since 1989 and a Professor of Medicine and Adjunct Professor of Epidemiology at the University of Washington. His research program focuses on the epidemiology of chronic illnesses mainly in veteran cohorts. He began work on the Millennium Cohort Study in 1999 as the sole VA investigator and since 2016 as the Chair of VA Cooperative Studies Program #505: Millennium Cohort Study. He was the founding Director of the Seattle Epidemiologic Research and Information Center at VA Puget Sound and held this position from 1997-2006. His research program also has focused on the epidemiology of type 2 diabetes mellitus and its complications. Dr. Boyko has served as consultant for NIH, VA, private foundations, and industry. In addition, since 1989 he has provided and continues to provide primary care to a panel of veteran patients at VA Puget Sound.

Michael J. Falvo, PhD, is a clinical exercise physiologist and studies mechanisms of dyspnea and exercise intolerance in the context of environmental and occupational exposures. His multidisciplinary laboratory conducts a program of federally funded research, as well as provides clinical cardiopulmonary services through the Department of Veterans Affairs Airborne Hazards and Burn Pits Center of Excellence (AHPCE). As Co-Director of the AHPCE, Dr. Falvo contributes to the center's efforts in clinical and translational research for improving health outcomes for veterans exposed to airborne hazards while deployed. He is also an Associate Professor at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School.

Nisha Jani, PhD, MPH, is an epidemiologist at the War Related Illness and Injury Study Center and Department of Veterans Affairs Airborne Hazards and Burn Pits Center of Excellence. Her research focuses on deployment related health outcomes with a focus on the health effects of airborne hazard exposure during deployment. Additionally, in role within the operations team of the AHOBPR she

oversees the integrity and quality of the registry data to ensure proper reporting and analysis. Dr. Jani is also a professor at Rutgers University School of Public Health.

COMMUNICATION

At any time throughout the study, you may share written comments on any aspect of the Statement of Task with the committee. Send your comments and any supporting documentation to Registry-Study@nas.edu.

To receive notifications about future committee events and the report release, sign up for the listserv [here](#).

STATEMENT OF TASK

In February 2017, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) published a report titled *Assessment of the Department of Veterans Affairs Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry*. The report was required by Public Law 112-260 (Section 201). This law also required an additional report not later than five years after completion of the initial effort.

The requirements of the Public Law include:

- (i) An update to the initial report described in subparagraph (A) of the Public Law.
- (ii) An assessment of whether and to what degree the content of the registry established under subsection (a) of the Public Law is current and scientifically up-to-date.

To accomplish this task, VA requests that the NASEM complete a report that:

- 1) conducts an independent scientific assessment of the effectiveness of actions taken by the Secretaries of Veterans Affairs and Defense to collect and maintain information in the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit (AH&OBP) Registry on the health effects of exposure to toxic airborne chemicals and fumes caused by open burn pits,
- 2) provides recommendations to improve the collection and maintenance of such information, and
- 3) using established and previously published epidemiologic studies, provides recommendations regarding the most effective and prudent means of using the AH&OBP Registry or another system of records to provide information that translates into learning more about the conditions that are likely to result from exposure to open burn pits. The assessment should also look at other means or methods to obtain similar or better information by VA and to achieve the goals of burn pit exposures research. Such means might include the Individual Longitudinal Exposure Record (ILER) and the Millennium Cohort Study.

The report should additionally address how VA has done in implementing the recommendations offered in the 2017 NASEM report and present recommendations on how to address gaps identified in the initial report and on burn pit and airborne hazards research, diagnosis, and treatment in general. It should review the scientific literature on other registries and self-reported databases for potential improvements and techniques that could be used by the AH&OBP Registry. The report shall include, to the extent permitted by the available data, a description of the data contained in the AH&OBP Registry, updating and augmenting the analyses presented in the 2017 initial report.

The report should make a recommendation on the best way to utilize resources for airborne hazards research. Does, for example, a more cost-effective way than the AH&OBP Registry exist to discover associations between airborne hazards and burn pit exposures and disease?

Lastly, the report should look at a potential end state to the AH&OBP Registry. At what point would it or any registry that is based on self-reported information complete its intended purpose? What alternative form of surveillance and identification of research candidates would need to be identified if the AH&OBP Registry was closed?

COMMITTEE ROSTER

David A. Savitz, Ph.D. (*Chair*)

Professor of Epidemiology, Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Associate Dean for Research
Brown University

John R. Balmes, M.D.

Professor of Medicine
University of California, San Francisco

Michelle Bell, Ph.D., M.S., M.S.E.

Mary E. Pinchot Professor of Environmental Health
Yale University

Michael J. Daniels, Sc.D.

Andrew Banks Family Endowed Chair and Professor Department of Statistics
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Marianthi-Anna Kioumourtzoglou, Sc.D., M.S.P.H.

Assistant Professor of Environmental Health Sciences
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Bhramar Mukherjee, Ph.D., M.S.

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Public Health, Research Professor
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Frances M. Murphy, M.D., M.P.H.

President and CEO
Sigma Health Consulting, LLC

Kristen M. Olson, Ph.D., M.S.

Leland J. and Dorothy H Olson Professor of Sociology and Director, Bureau of Sociological Research
University of Nebraska

Tyler Smith, Ph.D., M.S.

Professor and Statistical Epidemiologist
National University