



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

NASEM
2ND Review of the
Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry
(AHOBPR)
Charge to the Committee

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Agenda

- Charge statement to the NASEM
- AHOBPR background
 - Online portion (part 1)
 - Clinical Exam (part 2)
 - Data from the AHOBPR
- Outreach activities
- Other resources



Charge to the NASEM Committee (1/6)

- The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) published a report titled *Assessment of the Department of Veterans Affairs Airborne Hazards & Open Burn Pit Registry* (Feb 17)
 - The report was required by Public Law (PL) 112-260 (Section 201)
 - This is the law that established the AHOBPR
 - This law also required an additional report not later than five years after completion of the initial effort



Charge to the NASEM Committee (2/6)

- The requirements of PL 112-260 include
 - Update of the initial report described in subparagraph (A) of PL 112-260
 - Assessment of whether and to what degree the content of the Registry established under subsection (a) of the PL is current and scientifically up-to-date



Charge to the NASEM Committee (3/6)

To meet the requirements of PL 112-260, VA commissions NASEM to complete a report that:

1. Conducts an independent scientific assessment of the effectiveness of actions taken by the Secretaries of VA and DoD to collect and maintain information in the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit (AHOBP) 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



Charge to the NASEM Committee (4/6)

3. Provides recommendations regarding the most effective and prudent means of using the AHOBP 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
 - Use previously published epidemiologic studies
 - The report should also look at other means or methods to obtain similar or better information to improve burn pit exposures research
 - Such means might include:
 - Individual Longitudinal Exposure Record (ILER)
 - Millennium Cohort Study



Charge to the NASEM Committee (5/6)

4. The report should address:

- Implementation of recommendations offered in the 2017 NASEM report
- Recommendations to address gaps identified in the first report
- AHOBP hazards research, diagnosis, and treatment in general
- Review of the scientific literature on self-reported databases for potential improvements and techniques that could be used by the AHOBP Registry

5. The report shall include, to the extent permitted by the available data, a description of the data contained in the AHOBP Registry, updating and augmenting the analyses presented in the 2017 initial report.



Charge to the NASEM Committee (6/6)

6. The report should make a recommendation on the best way to utilize resources for airborne hazards research
 - Is there a more cost-effective way than the self-reported AHOBP Registry exist to discover associations between airborne hazards/burn pit exposures and disease?
7. The report should look at a potential end state to the AHOBP Registry
 - At what point would the AHOBP Registry or any self-reported registry complete its intended purpose?
 - Are there alternative forms of surveillance or identification of research candidates that would be superior to the self-identified AHOBP Registry?



Background



Veteran Concerns

1 in 3

report “definite or probable exposure to environmental hazards”

1 in 4

report “persistent major health concerns due to deployment exposures”





AHOBPR Purpose

- The Registry is intended to improve VA and DoD research efforts, claims and clinical care
- Send outreach messages (i.e. COVID messages)
- Provide clinicians individualized Registry information to support Veteran health education



Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry (AHOBPR)

- Institute of Medicine Report – *“Long-Term Consequences of Exposure to Burn Pits in Iraq and Afghanistan”* (2011)
 - Pollutants of greatest concern may be particulate matter from regional sources
- AHOBPR Mandated by Public Law 112-260 (2013)
- VA launched AHOBP Registry in June 2014
- NASEM *“Assessment of the Department of Veterans Affairs Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry”* (2017)
 - Initial report with 9 recommended actions
- Airborne Hazards and Burn Pits Center of Excellence (AHBPCE)
 - Designated by Congress and the President in Public Law 115-929 as a VA Center of Excellence through VHA Directive 0215.



AHOBP Registry: Eligibility

Eligibility is Stated in law:

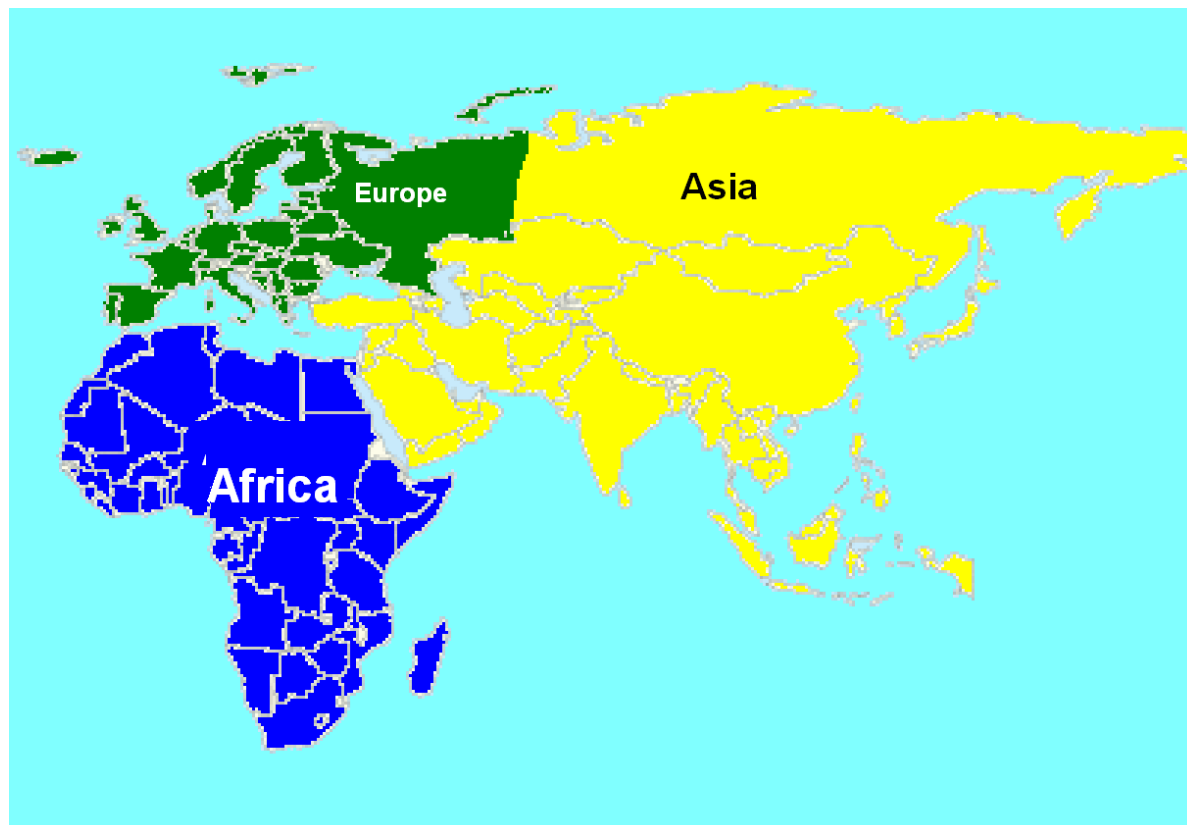
- Veterans or Service Members who deployed to the Southwest Asia theater of operations at any time on or after 1 August 1990; and/or Afghanistan or Djibouti on or after 11 September 2001





Non-Eligible Countries

- Syria (may be added)
- Egypt
- Somalia
- Yemen
- Uzbekistan
- Vietnam
- Philippines
- Korea
- Bosnia



- Adding countries risks diluting observations of effect
- Not joining the Registry does not mean no exposure
- Registries are not required or linked to the VA claims process



AHOBPR IT Infrastructure

- AHOBPR Registry migrated to the Veterans Integrated Registry Portal (VIRP) Summer 2019
- VIRP includes the following registries:
 - AHOBPR, Amputee, Breast Care, Embedded Fragments, Hearing, Kidney disease, Multiple Sclerosis, Oncology, Transplant, Traumatic Brain Injury
- VIRP has a sustainment and development team process.
- Current development focused on VAMC operational reports
- Future development to allow Service Members to add deployments
- Analysis is done in the VA Informatics and Computing Infrastructure (VINCI) workspace



Components: Airborne Hazards Open Burn Pit Registry



Online Portion

- Deployment Information
- Exposure and Health Concerns
- Health history
- Activity limitations
- Additional risk factors that may affect a Service Member's health
- ~1 hour to complete



Clinical Evaluation

- Every participant is eligible for a clinical evaluation
- Clinical evaluation and discussion of health risks
- Objective recording of current health status



The Registry: Online (Part 1)



Steps to Join the Registry

- Log in: DS Logon is
 - A secure identity (username and password) that is used by DoD and VA self-service websites, including eBenefits, to provide identity authentication.
 - Service Members use a Common Access Card
- Consent agreement (agree to provide information for the database)
- Available deployment histories are pulled from the Defense Manpower Database Center of DoD (DMDC) for eligibility
- Some cohorts* do not have this step automated and need to manually enrolled after proof of deployment such as DD 214 or orders
- Registry questions begin after eligibility is confirmed

*Pre 9-11, Special forces, those redeployed in last 90 days



Enrollment Page

Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry

Home

About the Registry

Help

Get Care

Contact Us ▾

Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry

Is this for me?

- The registry is a database of information about Veterans and Service members collected through a questionnaire.
- OEF/OIF/OND/OFS Veterans and Service members who have deployed to the Southwest Asia theater of operations on or after August 2, 1990 as well as those who have deployed to Afghanistan or Djibouti after September 11, 2001 can use the registry.
- Guidance for Civilians and Contractors can be found on the FAQ page.

[Learn more »](#)

Why sign up?

- Document your exposures and health concerns.
- Improve awareness of long-term health for you and all Veterans.
- Learn about follow up care at the VA.
- Satisfaction from helping other Veterans and Service members.

[Get Registry Help »](#)

Attention: The following groups may get an electronic message in the portal that you do not have an eligible deployment.

- Pre-9/11 Deployments
- Special forces
- Re-Deployed within 3 months

213,933 participants have joined the registry. Be next!

Sign up for the Registry

1. Use your **Premium DS Logon Level 2** account to access the questionnaire. You must have a **Premium DS Logon Level 2** account to participate.

[Need a DS Logon? »](#)

[DS Logon Sign in »](#)

2. Complete questionnaire and submit.
3. Print or save completed questionnaire for your records.
4. Schedule an optional, free health exam. Active duty should contact their local Military Treatment Facility. Veterans, National Guard, and Reserve should contact their local VA [Environmental Health Coordinator](#)

Available online at <https://veteran.mobilehealth.va.gov/AHBurnPitRegistry/#page/home>



Status in Registry*

Category	Number
No consent	18,077
Not eligible	23,002
Eligible (Automatic and reviewed)	114,784
Participants	217,448
Total	373,311

- No consent: cannot go further in registry
- Not eligible: Do not have a deployment to eligible country
- Eligible: Entered the Registry but have not finished
- Participants: finished online questionnaire (Part 1)
 - 65% of those who enter the Registry complete Part 1

*As of October 13, 2020



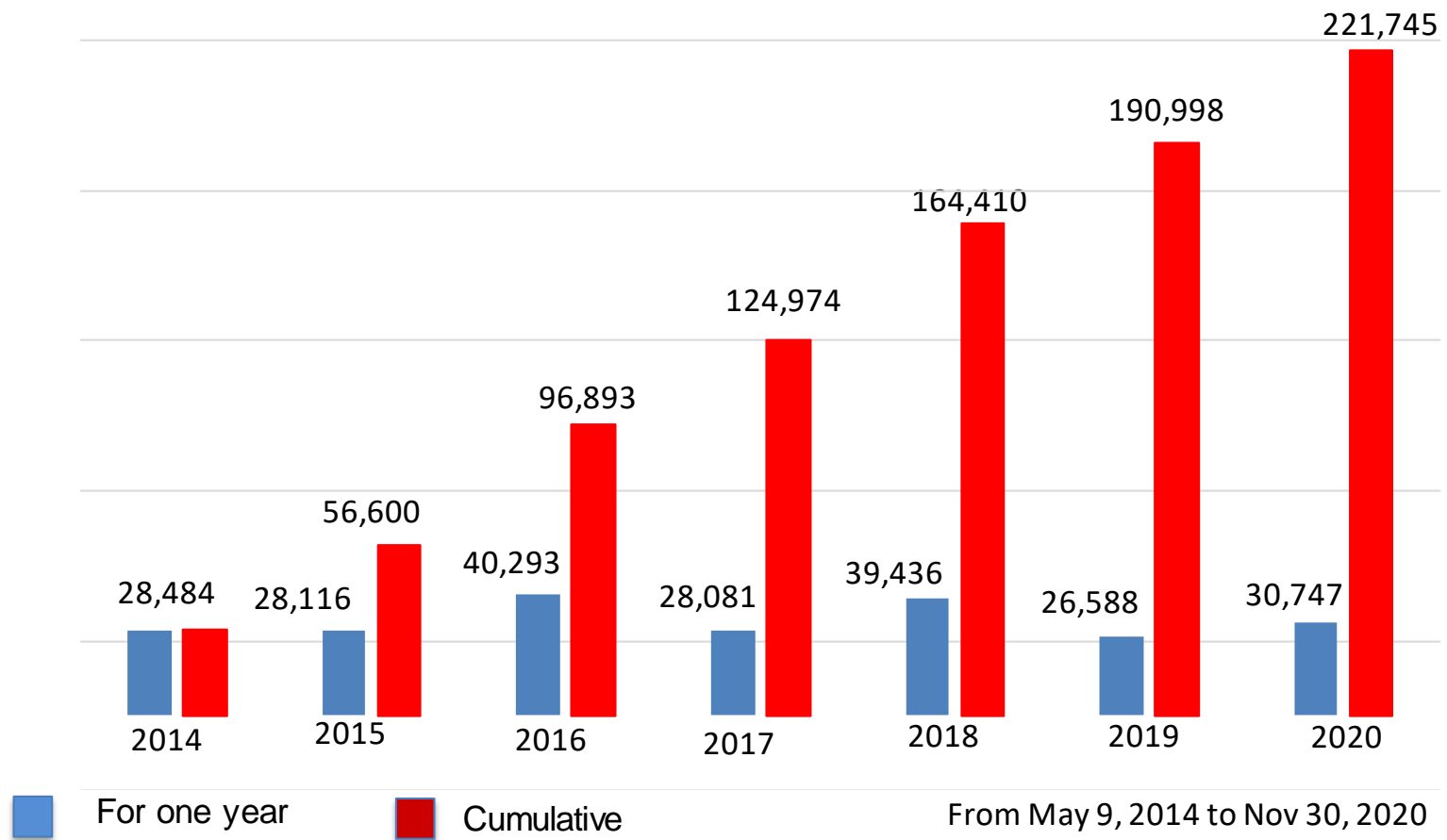
Section in which the eligible Veteran Stops

- June 2014 to March 2019
- 90,125; non-completion

Last Section view	Eligible Non-participant
Questionnaire Not-Started	34,802 (38.62%)
1. Deployment History	33,280 (36.93%)
2. Symptoms and Medical History	14,053 (15.59%)
3. Health Concerns	1,835 (2.04%)
4. Places You've Lived	1,544 (1.71%)
5. Work History	3,358 (3.73%)
6. Home Environment and Hobbies	379 (0.42%)
7. Health Care Utilization	704 (0.78%)
8. Contact Preferences	170 (0.19%)
Total	90,125 (100%)



Participants by year 2014 to 2020





The Registry: Clinical Exam (Voluntary) (Part 2)



How to Get a Clinical Exam

- Contact your local Environmental Health Coordinator for Veterans
 - Reserve and National Guard can be seen at VA for this exam when not on orders

Directory of Environmental Health Coordinators

Below is a directory of VA Environmental Health Coordinators by state and U.S. territory. Veterans may contact their local VA Environmental Health Coordinator about [registry evaluations](#) or [health concerns related to military exposures](#). You may also wish to see the [directory for the lead Environmental Health Coordinator in each Veterans Integrated Service Network \(VISN\)](#).

The directory contains the latest information received from VA health care facilities and is updated as changes occur.

For the health and safety of Veterans, local environmental health registry evaluations may be temporarily postponed due to the [novel coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#). We appreciate the importance of the registry evaluations to understand military environmental exposures. As a reminder, these exams are not tied to care, treatment or benefits. Please call your local [VA medical center](#) if you have a medical issue that needs attention. We remain committed to serving Veterans. VA will update the status of registry exam scheduling when there is new information.

AL	AK	AZ	AR	CA	CO	CT	DE	DC	FL	GA	HI	ID	IL	IN	IA	KS
KY	LA	MA	ME	MD	MS	MI	MN	MO	MT	NE	NV	NH	NJ	NM	NY	NC
ND	OH	OK	OR	PA	RI	SC	SD	TN	TX	UT	VT	VA	WA	WV	WI	WY

[Puerto Rico](#)

<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp>



AHOBPR Data

AHOBPR Data

- Summary of Self-Reported Registry Data

<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/burnpits/registry.asp>



Demographic Data: Age

	January 1, 2020 Number (%)	July 1, 2020 Number (%)
<25	1,115 (0.6%)	1,246 (0.6%)
25 - 34	43,403 (22.7%)	43,997 (21.0%)
35 - 44	70,100 (36.7%)	79,044 (37.8%)
45 - 54	49,747 (26.1%)	55,085 (26.3%)
55-64	14,626 (7.7%)	17,391 (8.3%)
65+	1,684 (0.9%)	2,022 (1.0%)
Missing	10,369 (5.4%)	10,392 (5.0%)
Total	191,044	209,177

Mean is 43 and Median 41

- 17,556 (8.4%) are Gulf War I Veterans
- 190,251 (90.9%) reported a burn pit exposure
- 120,061 (57.4%) reported burn pit duties
- 142,229 (67.9%) were close enough to feel the blast of an improvised explosive device



Life Transition Status

Duty Status	Number
Active Duty	55,610
Guard/Reserve	74,795
Separated	126,212
Retiree	113,580
Unknown	1,528
Deceased**	1,619
Grand total	373,344

Dynamic Registry: All active duty/reserve will separate or retire

**Deceased is all cause mortality to include suicide, MVA, substance abuse and many other causes. This is automated through VA Vital Status File

*As of October 13, 2020



Outreach Activities



Outreach Initiatives: Past/Current (1/2)

- Specific education of the AHOBPR and other military exposures occurs during Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Courses when a Service Member leaves the service since 2018.
- VHA offers a variety of communications products that explain the purpose of the Registry
 - Several webpages,
 - two videos available for online viewing,
 - regular social media postings,
 - multiple articles in the Gulf War and Post-9/11 Veteran newsletters,
 - VAntage Point blog posts, and several topical fact sheets.
- For 2018, the internet pages for the AHOBP Registry and burn pit exposures were ranked number three and six of the most visited VA webpages on military exposures, respectively.
- A podcast on the Airborne Hazard and Open Burn Pit Registry was released on March 9, 2020 as part of Borne the Battle #185



Outreach Initiatives: Past/Current (2/2)

- Veteran Service Organization (VSO) interaction
 - VFW periodically sends message to join
- DoD sent 800,000 letters to active duty, reserve and National Guard who are currently serving and have deployed to one of the eligible countries
 - Leave and earnings statement (LES) of all currently serving Service Members inviting them to join the AHOBPR. These messages will be repeated annually.
- Congressional hearings, media coverage
 - John Stewart advocacy
- Updated website later this month (through contract)
 - Advertising and other projects winter 2021



Purpose of Outreach Contract

VA is undertaking a strategic effort to improve the information and resources available to Veterans regarding airborne hazard exposures.

The primary objectives for this effort include:

- Updating all informational resources and content so that they are clearer and easier to find
- Providing more complete context about the science of environmental exposures
- Putting greater emphasis on information about:
 - How to apply for VA health care
 - File a claim for compensation and benefits
 - Talk to a health care provider about airborne hazard exposures
- Encouraging Veterans to join the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry (AHOBPR) including clearer messaging about:
 - The purpose of the registry (e.g. to support research efforts)
 - The relationship between the registry and VA claims or access to VA health care



Other Resources



- The AHBPCE has 4 priority areas:



**Airborne Hazards
and Open Burn
Pit Registry**



Clinical Care



Research



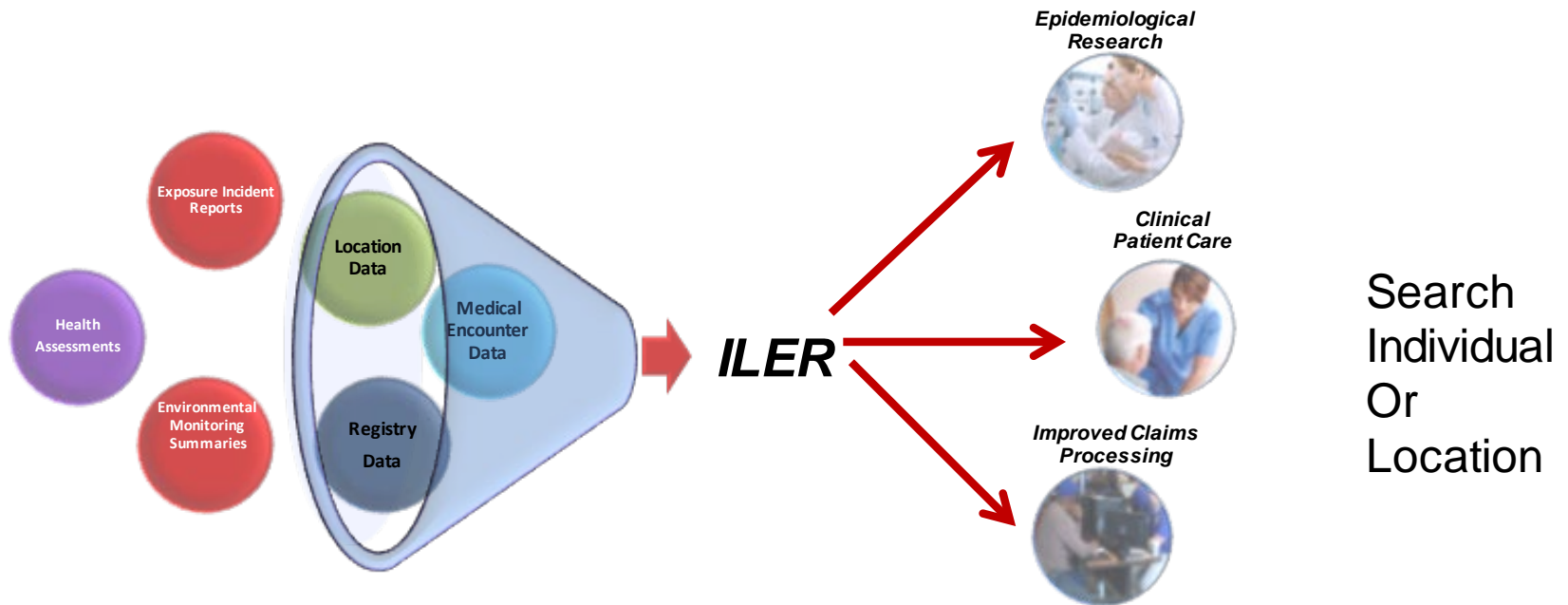
Education

- Clinical evaluation or complex cases within the Registry through our [Post-Deployment Cardiopulmonary Evaluation Network](#)
- Improve access and Veteran experience of the AHOBPR and optional clinical exam as well as raise awareness among VHA providers via collaboration with [IQuEST](#)
- Data quality/integrity of self-assessment questionnaires
- Advance scientific knowledge of AHOBPR-related concerns



Individual Exposure Longitudinal Record (ILER)

- Data goes into a funnel
- 2 tables appear (exposure event & personnel location) match between the two to show exposure record representing ILER
- The data is compiled into ILER. As a web-based application, ILER provides the DoD and VA the ability to link an individual to exposures, improving the efficiency, and quality of health care





DoD AHOBPR Info

- Go to <https://health.mil/Military-Health-Topics/Health-Readiness/Environmental-Exposures/VA-Airborne-Hazards-and-Open-Burn-Pit-Registry>

Additional Resources

[Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry DoD Health Care Provider CLINICAL TOOLBOX](#)

[Health Care Provider Guide to the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry](#)

[Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry Wallet Card](#)

[Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry Digital Poster](#)

Burn Pit Registry Video





Health.mil

The official website of the Military Health System

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- [Project 112/SHAD](#)
- [Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry](#)**
- [World War II Exposures](#)

[Global Health Engagement](#)

[Transmission Health](#)

Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) developed the [Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry](#) to help service members and veterans document potential exposure to airborne hazards while serving overseas.

The registry is a secure database of health information voluntarily provided by service members and veterans that helps VA collect, analyze, and report on health conditions that may be related to environmental exposures experienced during deployment. As part of the registry, service members and veterans can participate in an optional medical exam to discuss their health with a care provider. Participation in the registry will not affect access to health care or benefits, and it is not related to the VA disability compensation claims process.

Eligibility

VA determines eligibility for the registry based on deployment information from the Department of Defense (DoD). Service members and veterans who deployed to the **Southwest Asia theater of operations on or after August 2, 1990, or in Afghanistan or Djibouti on or after September 11, 2001**, may be eligible to sign up for the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry.

These regions include the following countries, bodies of water, and the airspace above these locations: Afghanistan; Bahrain; Djibouti; Gulf of Aden; Gulf of Oman; Iraq; Kuwait; Oman; Qatar; Saudi Arabia; United Arab Emirates; and waters of the Arabian Sea, Persian Gulf, and Red Sea.

How to Participate

Access the Registry

Visit the [VA Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry Website](#)

Get Registry Help

For assistance or question regarding the registry, please contact:

Registry Help Desk
1-877-470-5947
8:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time

Explore Resources

- [Registry User Guide](#)
- [Registry Fact Sheet](#)
- [Registry FAQs](#)
- [Respiratory Health Effects Airborne Hazards Exposure the Southwest Asia Theater Military Operations Report Highlights \(2020\)](#)
- [10 Things to Know About Pits](#)

Are a Veteran or service



IOM 2017: Improve Registry

1. VA should develop a specific plan for more seamlessly integrating relevant VA and DoD data sources with the Registry's data, with the goals of reducing future participant burden, increasing data quality by restructuring questions to minimize recall and other biases, and improving the usefulness of the Registry database as an information source for health care professionals and researchers
2. VA should involve external survey experts who are experienced in web-based instruments in any restructuring of the Registry questionnaire

A contract has been written and will be put out for bid FY 21 to be executed in FY 21



Other Resources of Interest

- Videos and on demand classes, and webinars
 - Environmental Health (EH) Clinicians and Coordinators
- Individual interviews and focus group reports from outreach contract
- The AHOBPR portal for VA staff
- Practice module to see questions as a Veteran
- Can pull data set for committee analytical team
- American Thoracic Society (ATS) fact sheet
 - (<https://www.thoracic.org/patients/patient-resources/resources/military-burn-pits.pdf>)



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

2ND AHOBP Registry Review Charge to the Committee

This presentation was an overview of facets of the AHOBP Registry program.

Thank You to the NASEM for
assistance in Veteran care