

National Academies Committee on Guidance on PFAS Testing and Health Outcomes

Western Communities Town Hall
Session E: Additional Community Perspectives



Veterans Health Council
Vietnam Veterans of America

“Never again will one generation of Veterans abandon another”

Aqueous Film Forming Foam (AFFF)

- Used to fight class B (petroleum) fires since 1970
- “Legacy foams” contained PFOS and/or PFOA; links to health effects
- Attempts to destroy legacy stock releases PFAS into the atmosphere
- Current foams **still contain PFAS**
 - Which ones?

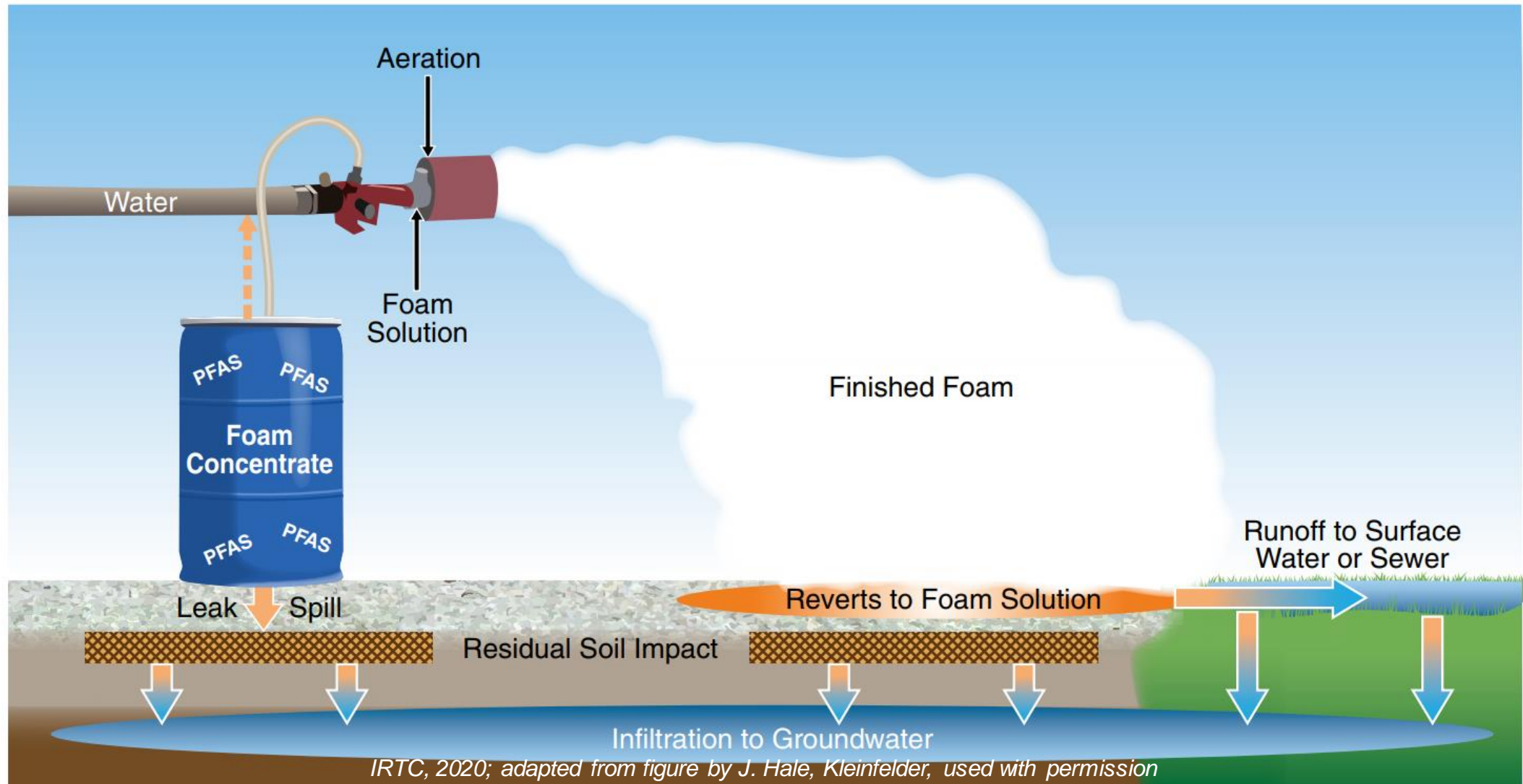


Decker, 2019

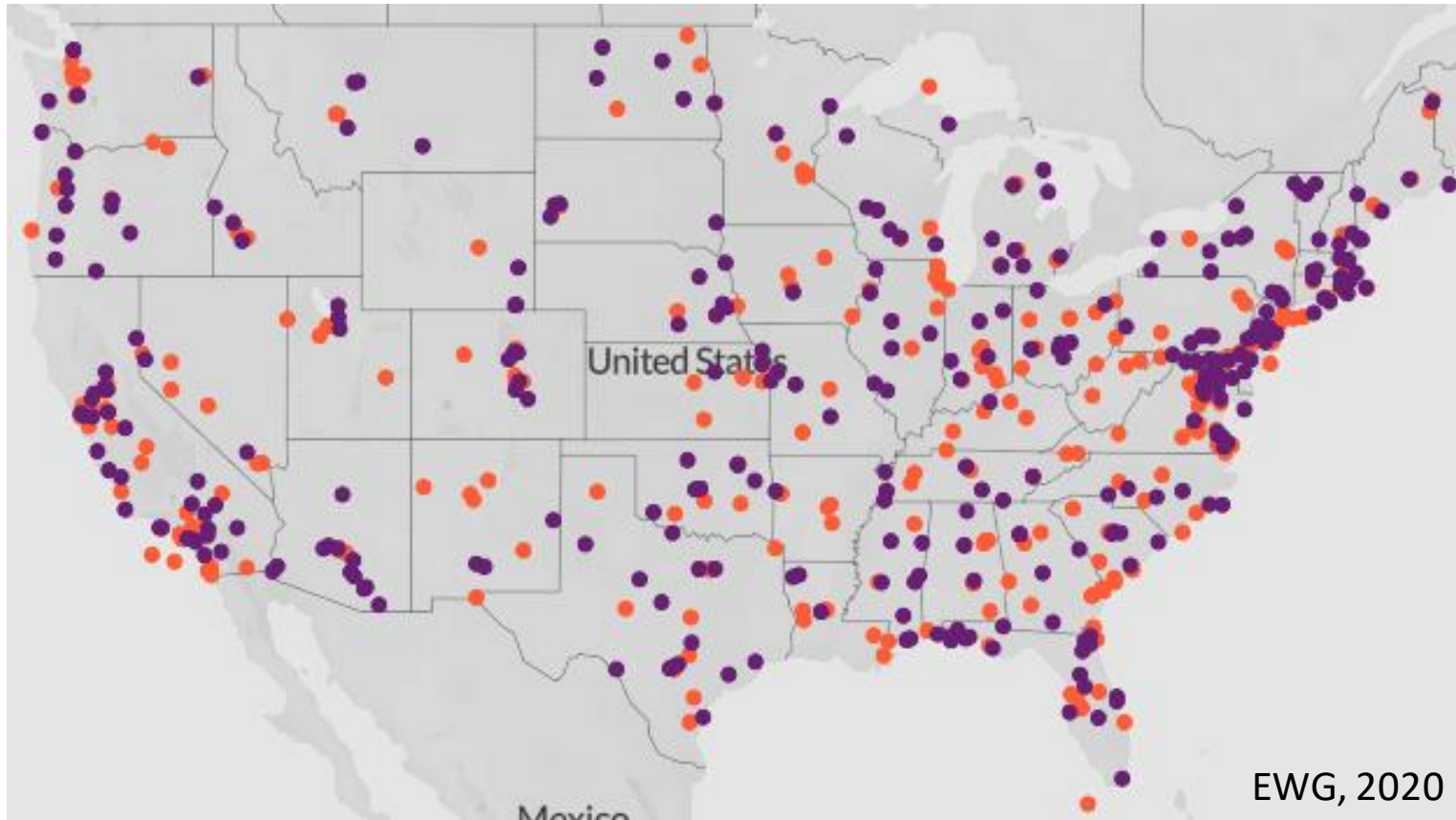


Polach, 2006

AFFF Release



PFAS Contamination



orange = suspected, purple = confirmed; Image used with permission

- confirmed or suspected at 678 military installations (image on left)
- confirmed in tap water or groundwater at 328 of the military installations

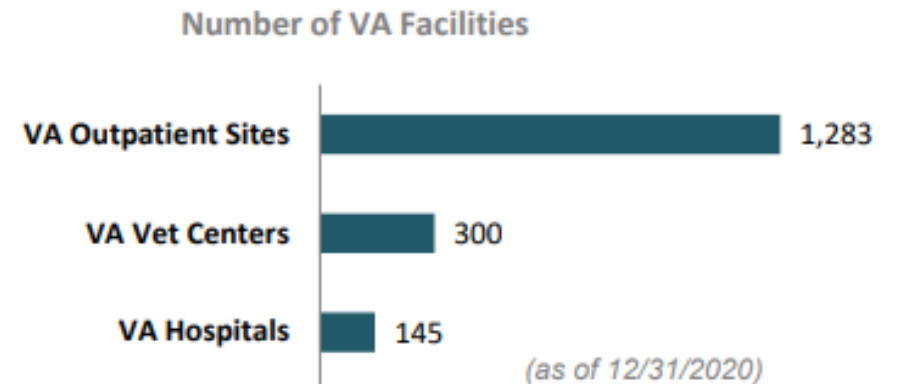
<https://bit.ly/2yOV6l3>

Veterans Health Administration

Nation's largest integrated health care system, part of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

Four statutory missions:

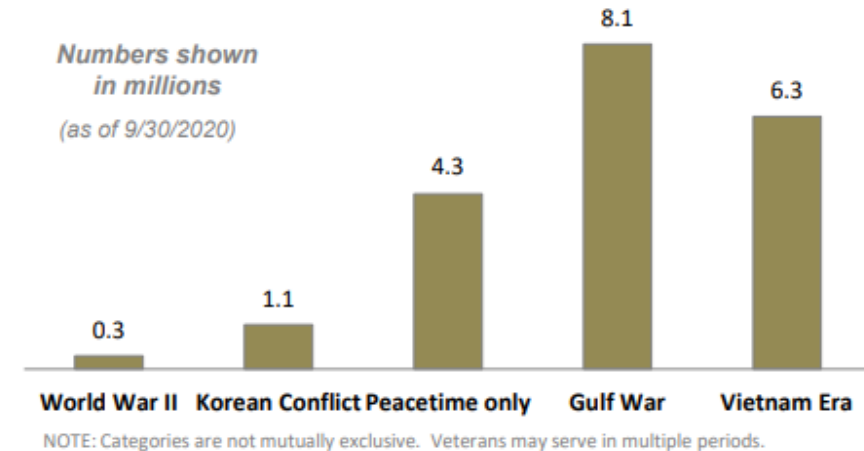
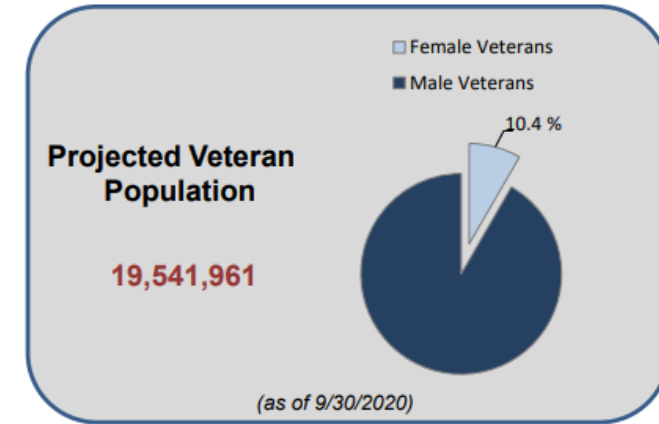
- develop, maintain, and operate a national health care delivery system **for eligible Veterans**
- administer a program of education and training for health care personnel
- conduct health care research
- provide contingency support for Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) during times of war or national emergency



VA Health Care Eligibility

- Less than 20% of Veterans receive all their care from the Veterans Health Administration (VHA)
 - 9.2 million Veterans are enrolled in VA health care
 - 6.45 million Veterans seek care from VHA each year
 - Often health care providers may be serving Veterans without realizing it

It is important to ask all patients “Have you ever served in the military?”



VA Health Care Eligibility

- After basic eligibility criteria met, enrollment depends on one or more of the following:
 - service-connected disability
 - income level
 - exposure to certain toxic substances and environmental hazards
 - other factors
 - former prisoner of war (POW) status
 - Medal of Honor recipient
 - Purple Heart recipient

Service-Connected Disability

- A disability that is the result of a disease or injury incurred or aggravated during active military service
- Service-connection usually requires:
 - **a current condition:** typically a medical diagnosis of a disease or injury
 - **an in-service event:** injuries, illnesses, exposures
 - **a nexus:** a medical opinion stating it is "at least as likely as not" (50% medical probability) that the current condition was caused by military service

Service-Connected Disability Benefits

- Rating
 - assigned 0% - 100% (10% increments) based on disease severity
- Compensation
 - tax-free monthly payment for service-connected disabilities based on rating
 - Dependency Indemnity Compensation (DIC) is also available to certain veterans' survivors.

| VBA | VHA | |
|---------|----------------|----------------------------------|
| rating | priority group | copays |
| 50%+ | 1 | none |
| 30%-40% | 2 | non service-connected conditions |
| 10%-20% | 3 | |

Takeaways

- Access to health care and disability compensation can have a tremendous impact on a Veteran's quality of life
- Despite potential concerns of causing distress, blood testing can
 - provide a critical piece of evidence to help Veterans gain access to health care in the future
 - lead to earlier and more frequent health screenings and other preventative care for conditions that are associated with PFAS exposure (current associations and those yet to be discovered)