



PRESS RELEASE

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VVA Urges All Veterans Exposed to Agent Orange Be Screened for Prostate Cancer

(Washington, D.C.) “Veterans exposed to Agent Orange are at least twice as likely to develop prostate cancer; their recurrence rates are higher; and recurring cancers are more aggressive,” noted Dr. Thomas Berger, Executive Director of VVA’s Veterans Health Council, before today’s Congressional Men’s Health Caucus Prostate Cancer Task Force. Berger urged his fellow Vietnam veterans to get screened, noting “it’s worth the fight.”

Said Berger, “Some three million veterans served in Southeast Asia, and no one knows for sure how many of these veterans were exposed to Agent Orange.” In 1996 the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences concluded there is “limited evidence of a positive association between prostate cancer and exposure to herbicides used in Vietnam, including Agent Orange.” As a result of IOM’s findings, Jesse Brown, then-Secretary of the Veterans Administration (VA), issued the final rule, recognizing prostate cancer as a service-connected, presumptive disease associated with exposure to Agent Orange and other phenoxy herbicides during military service, allowing such exposed veterans to become eligible for VA disability compensation and health care.

In 2008, University of California-Davis Cancer Center physicians released results of research showing Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange have greatly increased risks of prostate cancer and even greater risks of getting the most aggressive form of the disease as compared to those who were not exposed. The research was also the first to use a large population of men in their 60s and the prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test. More than 13,000 Vietnam veterans enrolled in the VA Northern California Health Care System were stratified into two groups, exposed or not exposed to Agent Orange between 1962 and 1971. Based on medical evaluations conducted between 1998 and 2006, the study revealed that:

- twice as many Agent Orange-exposed men were identified with prostate cancer than non-exposed;
- Agent Orange-exposed men were diagnosed two-and-a-half years younger than non-exposed; and
- Agent Orange-exposed men were nearly four times more likely to present with metastatic disease than non-exposed.

Further buttressing this link, in 2009, a study of 1,495 veterans in five cities who underwent radical prostatectomy to remove their cancerous prostates showed 206 exposed to Agent Orange had a near 50 percent increased risk of their cancer recurring, despite the cancer seeming nonaggressive at the time of surgery. And the cancer came back with a vengeance. The time it took the prostate-specific antigen, or PSA, level to double – an indicator of aggressiveness – was eight months versus more than 18 months in non-exposed veterans.

