

VETERANS CLAIMS EDUCATION · FREE GUIDE



PACT Act Claim Guide & Condition Checker

Burn pits, Agent Orange, radiation and Gulf War illness · Where you served · Condition checker · Not on a list? · Secondary conditions and SMC · How to file or refile · Survivors · Worksheets

Before you start: we are a free education resource. We are not VA, a VSO, an attorney or an accredited claims agent, and we don't assist with or file claims. Only VA decides. Examples are made up to show how the rules work. Describe your own experience truthfully; false statements to VA can have serious consequences.

The key idea: **where you served can be enough, and there's no deadline**

If you served in a covered location during the covered dates and have a condition on the list, VA presumes your service caused it. You don't have to prove a burn pit was near you. There is no deadline to file a PACT Act claim.

WHAT'S INSIDE

1. How the PACT Act works
2. Where you served
3. Condition checker
4. Not on a list? Then what
5. Secondary conditions
6. Special Monthly Compensation
7. How it's rated
8. How to file, refile and survivors
9. Examples
10. Myths
11. Your checklist

Worksheets: 1 Where I served · 2 My conditions and secondaries · 3 Next steps tracker · Also inside: Official sources

Lists change. VA adds (and sometimes removes) conditions. Check the current lists at veteransclaimsedu.com/the-pact-act or [VA.gov/PACT](https://va.gov/PACT) before you file.

SECTION 1

How the PACT Act works

There is no deadline to file a PACT Act claim. Old posts about a “PACT Act deadline” were about a past window for extra back pay, not a cutoff to apply. Filing sooner, or filing an Intent to File, just means pay can start sooner.

1. Where you served

A covered location during the covered dates (Section 2).

2. A listed condition

A diagnosis on that exposure's list (Section 3).

3. That's it

No medical opinion is needed for the link on a presumptive condition.

VA health care without a rating

You can enroll if you served in the Vietnam War, Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan or another post-9/11 combat zone; deployed in support of the Global War on Terror; or were exposed to toxins or hazards during service.

Toxic exposure screening

Every veteran enrolled in VA health care gets one, and a follow-up at least every 5 years. It records your exposures but doesn't file a claim.

EXAMPLE

No rating, still eligible

Nina deployed to Kuwait in 2005 and has never filed a claim.

She can enroll in VA health care based on that deployment, get her toxic exposure screening, and file a claim whenever she's ready.

Official sources: [PACT Act \(Public Law 117-168\)](#) · [VA: The PACT Act and your VA benefits](#) · [38 U.S.C. § 1710](#)

VETERANS CLAIMS
EDUCATION

Where you served

BURN PITS AND OTHER AIRBORNE HAZARDS

On or after	Covered locations (and the airspace above them)
Aug. 2, 1990	Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, United Arab Emirates, the neutral zone between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, and the waters of the Persian Gulf, Red Sea, Gulf of Oman, Gulf of Aden and Arabian Sea
Sept. 11, 2001	Afghanistan, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Uzbekistan, Yemen

AGENT ORANGE

Location	Dates
Vietnam, its inland waterways, or ships within 12 nautical miles offshore	Jan. 9, 1962 – May 7, 1975
In or near the Korean DMZ	Sept. 1, 1967 – Aug. 31, 1971
Any U.S. or Royal Thai base in Thailand PACT	Jan. 9, 1962 – June 30, 1976
Laos PACT	Dec. 1, 1965 – Sept. 30, 1969
Mimot or Krek, Kampong Cham Province, Cambodia PACT	Apr. 16 – Apr. 30, 1969
Guam or American Samoa, or their territorial waters PACT	Jan. 9, 1962 – July 31, 1980
Johnston Atoll, or a ship that called there PACT	Jan. 1, 1972 – Sept. 30, 1977

Also covered: C-123 aircraft crews and anyone who handled, tested or stored Agent Orange.

RADIATION CLEANUPS ADDED

Activity	Dates
Enewetak Atoll cleanup	1977 – 1980
Palomares, Spain, B-52 cleanup	Jan. 17, 1966 – Mar. 31, 1967
Thule AFB, Greenland, B-52 fire	Jan. 21 – Sept. 25, 1968

GULF WAR ILLNESS

Southwest Asia theater and its waters, on or after Aug. 2, 1990, plus Afghanistan, Israel, Egypt, Turkey, Syria and Jordan (airspace not included). No deadline.

EXAMPLE

Two lists, one veteran

Walt served on a cruiser off Vietnam in 1971 and in the Persian Gulf in 1991.

He checks both the Agent Orange list (Blue Water) and the burn pit list (Persian Gulf), and proves each location separately.

Official sources: [VA: Burn pits](#) · [VA: Agent Orange](#) · [VA: Radiation](#) · [VA: Gulf War illness](#) · [38 U.S.C. § 1116](#) · [§ 1119](#) · [38 CFR § 3.320](#) · [§ 3.317](#)

Condition checker

Tick every condition you have. **PACT** added by the PACT Act · **2024** **2025** added by VA later.

BURN PIT LIST: ILLNESSES

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| ☐ Asthma diagnosed after service | ☐ Chronic bronchitis PACT | ☐ COPD PACT |
| ☐ Chronic rhinitis | ☐ Chronic sinusitis | ☐ Constrictive or obliterative bronchiolitis PACT |
| ☐ Emphysema PACT | ☐ Granulomatous disease PACT | ☐ Interstitial lung disease PACT |
| ☐ Pleuritis PACT | ☐ Pulmonary fibrosis PACT | ☐ Sarcoidosis PACT |

BURN PIT LIST: CANCERS

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Brain cancer, glioblastoma PACT | ☐ Gastrointestinal cancer, any type PACT |
| ☐ Head or neck cancer, any type PACT | ☐ Kidney cancer PACT |
| ☐ Lymphoma, any type PACT | ☐ Melanoma PACT |
| ☐ Pancreatic cancer PACT | ☐ Reproductive cancer, any type PACT |
| ☐ Respiratory cancer, any type PACT | ☐ Bladder or ureter cancer 2025 |
| ☐ Acute or chronic leukemia 2025 | ☐ Multiple myeloma or MGUS 2025 |
| ☐ Myelodysplastic syndrome or myelofibrosis 2025 | ☐ Urethral or paraurethral gland cancer 2024 |

"Any type" can include

Examples to ask your doctor about

Gastrointestinal

Esophagus, stomach, small intestine, colon, rectum

Head and neck

Mouth, tongue, throat, voice box, salivary glands, nasal cavity and sinuses

Respiratory

Larynx, trachea, bronchus, lung, including rare types

Reproductive

VA's examples: cervical, ovarian, uterine, vaginal, vulvar

Breast cancer: the law doesn't name it. VA added male breast cancer by policy in 2024, then stopped presuming it as of Sept. 30, 2025. Men already granted keep their benefits; others can file a direct claim. Women should ask a VSO how VA is treating breast cancer under "reproductive cancer of any type." Only melanoma is on the list; other skin cancers can be claimed directly.

AGENT ORANGE LIST

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| ☐ AL amyloidosis | ☐ Bladder cancer | ☐ Chronic B-cell leukemias |
| ☐ Chloracne* | ☐ Diabetes type 2 | ☐ High blood pressure PACT |
| ☐ Hodgkin's disease | ☐ Hypothyroidism LATER | ☐ Ischemic heart disease |
| ☐ MGUS PACT | ☐ Multiple myeloma | ☐ Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma |
| ☐ Parkinson's disease or parkinsonism | ☐ Early-onset peripheral neuropathy* | ☐ Porphyria cutanea tarda* |
| ☐ Prostate cancer | ☐ Respiratory cancers, including lung | ☐ Some soft tissue sarcomas |

*Must reach at least 10% within 1 year of exposure.

GULF WAR ILLNESS

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Chronic fatigue syndrome | ☐ Fibromyalgia |
| ☐ IBS or other functional GI disorder | ☐ Unexplained symptoms 6+ months (joint pain, headaches, fatigue) |
| ☐ Tuberculosis or visceral leishmaniasis (any time) | ☐ Certain infections within 1 year (like malaria or Q fever) |

Easy to miss: “just allergies” or sinus trouble, asthma that started years later, breathing problems with “normal” tests, sarcoidosis outside the lungs, and MGUS found on routine bloodwork.

Official sources: [38 U.S.C. § 1120](#) · [38 CFR § 3.320](#) · [§ 3.309\(e\)](#) · [§ 3.317](#) · [2025 bladder/ureter rule](#) · [2025 leukemia/myeloma rule](#) · [VA 2024 announcement](#) · [Reporting on the 2025 reversal](#)

4 · NOT ON A LIST? THEN WHAT

1. Check every list: burn pits, Agent Orange, Gulf War, radiation, Camp Lejeune, and chronic diseases within 1 year of discharge.
2. Check for a secondary link: is it caused or worsened by something already service-connected, or by its treatment? (Section 5)
3. File a direct claim: diagnosis, exposure and service records, and a doctor’s opinion that it’s “at least as likely as not” related.
4. Ask for the PACT Act exam. If you had a toxic exposure and your evidence shows the condition and the exposure, VA must give an exam and opinion in many cases, considering all your deployments and exposures together.
5. Use the benefit of the doubt: when the evidence is about equal, VA must decide in your favor.
6. File anyway, and watch for changes. If VA adds your condition later, file a Supplemental Claim.

Sample opinion: *“I reviewed the veteran’s deployment history to Iraq and Afghanistan and his medical records. Considering his combined exposures to burn pit smoke and airborne hazards, it is at least as likely as not that his [condition] is related to his service, because [medical reasoning].”*

EXAMPLE

Male breast cancer now

Sam served in Kuwait and was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2026.

It’s no longer presumed for men. He files a direct claim with his deployment record and an oncologist’s opinion, and VA must consider an exam that looks at all his exposures.

Official sources: [38 U.S.C. § 1168](#) · [38 CFR § 3.159](#) · [§ 3.102](#) · [§ 3.303](#)

VETERANS CLAIMS
EDUCATION

Secondary conditions

Anything a service-connected condition causes or makes worse, including treatment side effects, can be service-connected too. Each gets its own rating. You need a diagnosis and a medical opinion for each.

Service-connected condition	Possible secondary conditions
Diabetes type 2	Peripheral neuropathy, kidney disease, eye disease, erectile dysfunction, heart disease
High blood pressure	Heart disease, kidney disease, stroke
Asthma, COPD, bronchitis	Steroid side effects (diabetes, bone loss, cataracts), heart strain, depression or anxiety
Chronic sinusitis or rhinitis	Sleep problems; sleep apnea if a doctor links it
Prostate, bladder or reproductive cancer	Erectile dysfunction, incontinence, bowel problems, infertility, scars
Head and neck cancer treatment	Hypothyroidism after radiation, trouble swallowing, dry mouth, voice loss, dental problems
Chemotherapy	Neuropathy, hearing loss or ringing, heart problems, lymphedema, depression or anxiety
Parkinson's disease	Each effect rated separately: tremor, speech, swallowing, bladder, bowel, depression
Fibromyalgia, IBS, chronic fatigue	Depression, anxiety, sleep problems

How to write it: *"Peripheral neuropathy, both feet, secondary to service-connected type 2 diabetes (Agent Orange)."*

EXAMPLE

Diabetes leads to more

Hank's diabetes is service-connected. Now his feet are numb and his kidney function is dropping.

He files neuropathy and kidney disease as secondary, each with a doctor's opinion.

EXAMPLE

Medication side effects

Jo's asthma is service-connected. Years of steroids led to bone loss.

Her doctor links the bone loss to the steroids prescribed for asthma, and she files it as secondary.

Official sources: [38 CFR § 3.310](#) · [§ 4.14](#) · [Connecting Your Condition guide](#)

SECTION 6

Special Monthly Compensation

SMC is extra monthly pay on top of your rating for certain losses. It's often missed after toxic exposure conditions and their treatment.

Type	When it can apply	Examples
SMC-K	Loss or loss of use of a reproductive organ, a hand or foot, or an eye; loss of 25% or more of breast tissue or radiation treatment of breast tissue; complete loss of voice	ED after prostate cancer treatment; hysterectomy or removal of ovaries; mastectomy; voice box removed
SMC-S	One condition at 100% plus others totaling 60%, or permanently housebound	Lung cancer at 100% during treatment plus 60% from other conditions
SMC-L and higher	You need help with daily activities, or have certain severe losses	Advanced cancer, advanced Parkinson's disease

EXAMPLE

Prostate cancer and SMC-K

Bob's prostate cancer is service-connected under Agent Orange. After surgery he has erectile dysfunction.

ED is rated as secondary, and it also qualifies for SMC-K, extra monthly pay on top of his combined rating.

Official sources: [38 CFR § 3.350](#) · [38 U.S.C. § 1114](#) · [SMC guide](#)

7 · HOW IT'S RATED (BRIEF)

Condition type	What drives the rating
Active cancer	Usually 100% during treatment and for a period after, then a VA exam; then VA rates what's left
Lung and breathing	Breathing test results and treatments like inhalers, steroids or oxygen
Sinus and nose	Episodes, antibiotics, blockage and polyps
Diabetes	Treatment needed and limits on activity
High blood pressure	Blood pressure readings and medication
Gulf War illnesses	Fibromyalgia, IBS and chronic fatigue have their own criteria; undiagnosed illnesses are rated by analogy

Official sources: [38 CFR Part 4](#) · [§ 4.25 \(combined ratings\)](#) · [CFR Explained guide](#)

How to file, refile and survivors

1. File an Intent to File online, by phone (800-827-1000) or on [VA Form 21-0966](#).
2. Check your locations and dates on Worksheet 1.
3. Get your diagnosis in writing from any provider.
4. Gather proof of where you served: DD-214, orders, deployment records, evaluations, or ship records.
5. File [VA Form 21-526EZ](#) and answer the toxic exposure questions. Name each location and the dates.
6. Go to any C&P exam VA schedules.
7. Read the decision. Disagree? Ask for a review within 1 year of the decision to keep your effective date. That's a review window, not a PACT Act deadline.

Denied before the law changed?

File a Supplemental Claim on [VA Form 20-0995](#). VA says it will try to contact veterans who may now qualify, but don't wait. Already filed? No action needed; conditions added later still count.

Survivors

DIC if the veteran died from a listed condition, including previously denied DIC claims. A pending claim can usually continue if a survivor asks to substitute within 1 year. Also: accrued benefits, CHAMPVA, education and burial benefits.

EXAMPLE

A high blood pressure denial

VA denied Ray's high blood pressure in 2019. He served in Vietnam in 1968.

Hypertension is now on the Agent Orange list. He files a Supplemental Claim naming the PACT Act.

Official sources: [VA Form 21-526EZ](#) · [VA Form 20-0995](#) · [38 CFR § 3.2501](#) · [§ 3.1010 \(substitution\)](#) · [VA: DIC](#)

VETERANS CLAIMS
EDUCATION

Real-life examples

BURN PITS

Iraq and COPD

Marcus served at Balad, Iraq, in 2006 and has COPD.

Iraq is covered and COPD is listed. His deployment record and diagnosis are enough.

AT SEA

Persian Gulf sinusitis

Kim served on a destroyer in the Persian Gulf in 2003 and has chronic sinusitis.

The Persian Gulf waters count for the burn pit list.

DJIBOUTI

Asthma after service

Ty was at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, in 2015 and developed asthma two years after discharge.

Djibouti counts on or after Sept. 11, 2001, and asthma diagnosed after service is listed.

2025 ADDITION

Leukemia

Rosa served in Kuwait in 1991 and was diagnosed with chronic leukemia.

VA added leukemias in 2025. If she was denied before, she files a Supplemental Claim.

WOMEN VETERANS

Ovarian cancer

Maria deployed to Iraq in 2008 and has ovarian cancer.

Ovarian cancer is a reproductive cancer on the burn pit list.

THAILAND

High blood pressure

Gary was at a Royal Thai Air Force base in 1970 and has hypertension.

Both the location and the condition were added by the PACT Act.

GUAM

MGUS

Ann was stationed on Guam in 1978 and was diagnosed with MGUS.

Guam counts through July 31, 1980.

RADIATION

Enewetak cleanup

Jim was on the Enewetak cleanup in 1979 and has thyroid cancer.

Enewetak is a radiation-risk activity, and thyroid cancer is on the radiation list.

GULF WAR

IBS, no deadline

Tony served in Kuwait in 1991 and has IBS.

IBS is a functional GI disorder on the Gulf War list. There's no deadline.

SURVIVOR

Glioblastoma

Lisa's husband served in Afghanistan in 2010 and died of glioblastoma in 2020. Her DIC claim was denied then.

Glioblastoma is now presumptive. She files a Supplemental Claim for DIC.

PACT Act myths

Myth	Fact
"There's a deadline to file."	There's no deadline. VA says the PACT Act is here to stay.
"I have to prove I was near a burn pit."	No. For presumptive conditions, serving in a covered location is enough.
"I need a rating to get VA health care."	Not if you served in these eras or locations, or had a toxic exposure.
"Sailors don't count."	The Persian Gulf, Red Sea, Gulf of Oman, Gulf of Aden and Arabian Sea count, plus Guam and American Samoa waters and ships at Johnston Atoll.
"If it's not listed, I can't win."	You can still win directly, and VA may owe you an exam that considers all your exposures.
"The Camp Lejeune lawsuit and VA benefits are the same."	They're separate. The window for new Camp Lejeune Justice Act claims ended in August 2024; VA disability and health care benefits for Camp Lejeune are still available.

11 · YOUR CHECKLIST

- ☐ Checked my locations and dates against every list (Worksheet 1)
- ☐ Ticked every condition in the condition checker, including "any type" cancers and easy-to-miss illnesses
- ☐ Have a diagnosis in writing for each
- ☐ Listed secondary conditions and treatment side effects (Worksheet 2)
- ☐ Asked about SMC for loss of a reproductive organ, breast tissue, voice, or need for help at home
- ☐ Filed an Intent to File
- ☐ Enrolled in VA health care and got my toxic exposure screening
- ☐ Filed VA Form 21-526EZ and answered the toxic exposure questions
- ☐ Denied before? Filed a Supplemental Claim
- ☐ Not on a list? Listed all exposures and asked for an exam or sent a doctor's opinion
- ☐ Survivor? Checked DIC and substitution

Official sources: [VA: Camp Lejeune](#) · [VA: PACT Act](#)

WORKSHEET 1

Where I served

List every place you served. Then check it against the locations in Section 2.

Location (country, base, ship or waters)	Dates	Proof I have	Which list it may fit	Covered?
Balad, Iraq	3/2006 – 3/2007	DD-214, orders	Burn pit	Yes
USS Example, Persian Gulf	2003	Evaluations, cruise book	Burn pit; Gulf War	Yes



VETERANS CLAIMS
EDUCATION

My conditions and secondaries

List each condition, the list or path it fits, what it may lead to, and whether SMC may apply.

Condition	Diagnosed (when, by whom)	List or path	Possible secondary conditions	SMC to ask about?
Prostate cancer	2021, VA urology	Agent Orange	ED, incontinence	SMC-K (ED)
Diabetes type 2	2015, Dr. Lee	Agent Orange	Neuropathy, kidney	—



VETERANS CLAIMS
EDUCATION

[illegible]

Official sources

The rules in this guide come from these official sources. Click or type any link. Lists change; check the current versions before you file.

- The law: [PACT Act, Public Law 117-168](#) · [38 U.S.C. § 1116](#) · [§ 1117](#) · [§ 1119](#) · [§ 1120](#) · [§ 1168](#) · [§ 1710](#) · [§ 1114](#)
- Regulations: [38 CFR § 3.102](#) · [§ 3.159](#) · [§ 3.303](#) · [§ 3.307](#) · [§ 3.309](#) · [§ 3.310](#) · [§ 3.311](#) · [§ 3.317](#) · [§ 3.320](#) · [§ 3.350](#) · [§ 3.1010](#) · [§ 3.2501](#) · [Part 4](#)
- VA rules added after the PACT Act: [Bladder and ureter cancers \(2025\)](#) · [Leukemias, multiple myeloma, MDS and myelofibrosis \(2025\)](#) · [Urethral, paraurethral and male breast cancers \(2024\)](#)
- Male breast cancer reversal: [ProPublica / The Lund Report](#) (VA's memo wasn't published)
- VA pages: [The PACT Act and your VA benefits](#) · [Burn pits](#) · [Agent Orange](#) · [Radiation](#) · [Gulf War illness](#) · [Camp Lejeune](#) · [DIC](#) · [Find an accredited representative](#)
- Forms: [VA Form 21-0966](#) · [VA Form 21-526EZ](#) · [VA Form 20-0995](#) · [VA Form 21-4138](#) · [VA Form 21-10210](#)
- More free guides: [The PACT Act](#) · [Presumptive Conditions](#) · [Sea Service by Era](#) · [Connecting Your Condition](#) · [SMC](#)

Stressed or struggling? You don't have to wait for a crisis. Dial 988, then press 1 · Text 838255 · Free, confidential, 24/7.

Disclaimer: This guide provides general educational information about the PACT Act and VA toxic exposure claims. It is not legal or medical advice, does not guarantee any outcome, and is not affiliated with or endorsed by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Veterans Claims Education is a free education resource; we don't assist with, prepare or file claims and never charge fees. Free help is available from accredited VSOs. Forms and presumptive lists change; check VA.gov and our website for the current versions. Examples are made up to show how the rules work. VA decides each claim on its evidence. AI-assisted. © Veterans Claims Education. All rights reserved.

