From: March, Joseph H.
To: Public Relations Division
Subject: Release - Hill: VA "doing the right thing" on Agent Orange
Date: Wednesday, September 01, 2010 4:49:00 PM
Importance: High

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hill: VA 'doing the right thing' on Agent Orange

MILWAUKEE (Sept. 1, 2010) -- A new VA regulation adding three health conditions to the list of those presumed to have been caused by exposure to the toxic defoliant Agent Orange during the Vietnam War was published this week. Pending a 60-day congressional review, the regulation will make some 200,000 veterans eligible for VA benefits over the next year and a half.

"VA is doing the right thing, and this is really going to be a great help to the many Vietnam veterans who've struggled for years to get recognition and treatment for these disorders," American Legion National Commander Clarence E. Hill said from Milwaukee where the nation's largest veterans organization is conducting its 92nd national convention. "This will really help ease the difficult process for them, and in the long run, will help VA process these claims much more quickly than they have in the past."

The regulation adds Parkinson's disease and ischemic heart disease to the list of presumptive disorders associated with Agent Orange and will expand chronic lymphocytic leukemia to include all chronic B cell leukemias, such as hairy cell leukemia.

By adding these conditions to the presumptive list of disabilities, veterans will no longer have to face as stringent evidentiary requirements and can greatly speed their applications to receive benefits, especially access to VA health-care services.

The decision to add the presumptive diseases was initiated by VA Secretary Eric Shinseki in October of 2009 following evidence published in a 2008 independent study by the Institute of Medicine concerning health problems caused by herbicides like Agent Orange. Veterans who served in Vietnam any time from Jan. 9, 1962, to May 7, 1975, are presumed to have been exposed to herbicides.

Many veterans are potentially eligible for retroactive disability payments based on past claims. Additionally, VA will review approximately 90,000 previously denied claims from Vietnam veterans for service-connection status for the conditions. All those awarded service-connection distinction who are not currently eligible for enrollment into the VA health-care system will become eligible.

The regulation is subject to provisions of the Congressional Review Act that require a 60-day review period before implementation. After that period, VA can begin paying benefits for new claims and may award benefits retroactively for earlier periods if a veteran had previously filed under the old law and was denied benefits.

The American Legion is encouraging Vietnam veterans with these three diseases to submit their applications for access to VA health care and compensation now so the agency can

begin development of their claims.

Veterans who believe they may be entitled to these benefits, or who feel that they need help processing a claim for benefits should contact an American Legion Department Service Officer. A directory for finding a Department Service Officer in your home state can be found here: http://www.legion.org/departmentofficers

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Media contacts: Joe March, or Craig Roberts (414) 908-5475. A color photo of Nat. Cmdr. Hill can be downloaded at www.legion.org.