

Veterans for Change Fights for Presumptive Disability

March 17, 2009 posted by [Robert O'Dowd](#) · [7 Comments](#)



by Robert O'Dowd, Staff Writer

The Veterans for Change (VFC) supports legislation to include veterans under the VA presumptive disability category who were exposed to trichloroethylene (TCE) and tetrachloroethylene (PCE) in the military and are seriously ill from diseases linked to these chemicals.

The VFC was founded in 2006 by Jim Davis, son of retired Marine Master Gunnery Sergeant (MGySgt) Lesley Davis who died of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) often referred to as

"Lou Gehrig's Disease," from exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam.

Davis said that the VFC supported a successful national effort to include ALS under the VA Presumptive Disability category in 2008.

Davis, President of the VFC, also said that the VFC recently prepared a draft TCE/PCE Reduction bill modeled after a previous bill (2008 TCE Reduction Act), which did not make it out of committee for a Congressional vote.

Davis indicated that he met with California Congressional staffers, and is now circulating a petition for support among veterans and others.

Copies of the petition can be obtained from the VFC by sending an email to Jim Davis at jdavis92840@sbcglobal.net.

According to Davis: "If the VFC legislation is signed into law with the TCE/PCE presumptive disability provision intact, veterans with illnesses linked to TCE/PCE exposure and stationed on military bases where there's evidence of exposure to these contaminants would be eligible for VA compensation disability payments and medical care from the VA. This is not like winning the lottery, but for many disabled veterans, this would definitely help pay the bills."

TCE is a widespread contaminant among many water systems in the U.S. A 2003 Air Force Pentagon report estimated that there were 1,400 TCE-contaminated military sites.

Military Bases Contaminated

The Marine Corps Times reported 22 military bases with TCE contaminated water in June 2007:

- Air Force Plant #4 (General Dynamics) — Fort Worth, Texas
- Andersen Air Force Base — Yigo, Guam
- Marine Corps Logistics Base Barstow — Barstow, Calif.
- Cornhusker Army Ammunition Plant — Hall County, Neb.
- Fairchild Air Force Base (4 waste areas) — Spokane, Wash.
- Lake City Army Ammunition Plant — Independence, Mo.
- March Air Force Base — Riverside, Calif.
- Mather Air Force Base — Mather, Calif.
- McChord Air Force Base — Tacoma, Wash.
- McClellan Air Force Base — McClellan AFB, Calif.
- Middletown Air Field — Middletown, Pa.
- Naval Air Development Center — Warminster Township, Pa.
- Naval Weapons Industrial Reserve Plant — Bedford, Mass.
- Nebraska Ordnance Plant — Mead, Neb.
- Norton Air Force Base — San Bernardino, Calif.
- Old Roosevelt Field — Garden City, N.Y.
- Otis Air National Guard Base/Camp Edward — Falmouth, Mass.
- Picatinny Arsenal (U.S. Army) — Rockaway Township, N.J.
- Pease Air Force Base — Portsmouth/ Newington, N.H.
- Whiting Field Naval Air Station — Milton, Fla.
- Wurtsmith Air Force Base — Oscoda, Mich.
- New Brighton/ Arden Hills (Army) — New Brighton, Minn.

The same Marine Corps Times news story provided internet links with information on the health effects of exposure to contaminants found on these bases. The information was compiled by The Agency for Toxic Substances Disease Registry (ATSDR), a Federal agency charged with responsibility for performing public health assessments. (See: http://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/2007/06/marine_water_list_070625/).

Our research found that the National Priority List (EPA Superfund) contains 133 military bases. Many of these bases are contaminated with TCE/PCE and other deadly contaminants. Not everyone on these bases was exposed to these chemicals. Exposure to TCE/PCE can occur through ingestion (drinking water), inhalation, and dermal contact. (See: [www. http://militarysuperfunds.blogspot.com/](http://militarysuperfunds.blogspot.com/))

VFC Supports Presumptive Disability

According to the San Bernardino County's Department of Veterans Affairs: "In many cases the veteran or dependent must provide a statement, preferably a medical statement, that links (nexus) the current disability with a disability incurred or worsened in service. Or, you must provide medical evidence to link a new condition to an existing service-connected disability (secondary service-connection). The nexus statement must be very clear to fit the criteria required by the VA. You need to discuss this issue with your representative, who can help you write a letter for your doctor or tell you what you need to do to get a nexus statement." (see: [hss.co.san-bernardino.ca.us/va/PDFs/10-DutytoAssist.pdf](https://www.san-bernardino.ca.us/va/PDFs/10-DutytoAssist.pdf))

Davis told us that including exposure to TCE/PCE under the VA's Presumptive Disability category eliminates the need for an expensive medical nexus statement that many veterans can't afford.

http://www.salem-news.com/articles/february092009/ptsd_documentary_1-21-09.php
http://www.salem-news.com/articles/february092009/ptsd_documentary_1-21-09.php The VA currently has four groups of veterans under the Presumptive Disability category, including former POWs, Vietnam veterans (exposed to Agent Orange); atomic veterans (exposed to ionizing radiation); and Gulf War veterans.

TCE and PCE Known Carcinogens

In Congressional testimony on TCE/PCE contamination of Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune in June 2007, ATSDR reported on some of the health effects of exposure to TCE/PCE.

Dr. Thomas Sinks, Deputy Director, ATSDR, stated that: "Occupational exposure to TCE may cause nervous system effects, kidney, liver and lung damage, abnormal heartbeat, coma, and possibly death. Occupational exposure to TCE also has been associated with adult cancers such as kidney cancer, liver and biliary cancer, and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

TCE in drinking water has been associated with childhood leukemia in two studies and with specific birth defects such as neural tube defects and oral clefts in one study."

Dr. Sinks noted that: "PCE is a manufactured chemical used for dry cleaning and metal degreasing. Occupational exposure to PCE can cause dizziness, headaches, sleepiness, confusion, nausea, difficulty in speaking and walking, unconsciousness, Exposure to PCE-contaminated drinking water has been linked with adult cancers such as non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, leukemia, bladder cancer, and breast cancer.

Inhalation and ingestion are important routes of exposure for both TCE and PCE. Both chemicals are listed in the 11th Report on Carcinogens from the National Toxicology Program as reasonably anticipated to be human carcinogens. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) established Maximum Contaminant Levels for drinking water of 5 parts per billion (ppb) for PCE in 1991 and for TCE in 1987." (See: energycommerce.house.gov/cmte_mtgs/110-oi-hrg.061207.Sinks-Testimony.pdf)

The latency period or the time between first exposure to a cancer-causing agent and clinical recognition of the disease can be 20 years or more. For many veterans this means that there is no record of cancer in their military service medical records, requiring them to obtain an opinion from a medical expert linking their cancer to military service. The VA calls this a nexus opinion and this can cost thousands of dollars.

We called one medical doctor and toxicologist on the west coast and confirmed that a one page medical report would cost about \$3,000. The doctor's office advised the cost would go up depending upon the medical records required to be reviewed.

The rub is that seriously ill veterans, out of work, often lack the financial means to pay for these services. Without a medical nexus opinion, the VA will likely deny the veteran's disability compensation claim.

There's a better way to repay those who served our country: Include disabled veterans exposed to TCE/PCE under the VA's presumptive disability category. It's the right thing to do.

For more information on the VFC, see groups.yahoo.com/group/VETERANS-FOR-CHANGE