



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

October 8, 2009

The Honorable Byron Dorgan
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Dorgan:

Thank you for your co-signed letter regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) actions in response to a potential exposure of National Guard members to hexavalent chromium at Qarmat Ali, Iraq from April to October 2003.

VA has been proactive in its response to this exposure event. There are approximately 600 National Guard members, primarily from four states, who may have been exposed to sodium dichromate (a source of hexavalent chromium) while serving at Qarmat Ali. In June 2008, when we first learned of this exposure, all VA Environmental Health Coordinators who run the registry program were provided background information about this issue and were instructed to offer a Registry examination to all Veterans who were potentially exposed to sodium dichromate in 2003. In addition, local VA staff is participating in meetings held by the National Guard to provide information about enrolling for VA health care, scheduling a health registry examination, and obtaining details about other VA benefits.

We have the names and contact information of all National Guard members present at Qarmat Ali. We have also verified the numbers of these Veterans who have received a Gulf War Registry (GWR) examination. The enclosed Fact Sheet provides a State-by-State breakdown of those numbers. In addition, many of the Guard members have also enrolled in the VA health care system.

We are in the process of augmenting the GWR to reflect service at Qarmat Ali. The involved Guard members who have had an initial examination will be recalled to have a complete exposure assessment, as well as a more targeted physical examination and ancillary testing looking for indications of health outcomes that may be related to hexavalent chromium. Those who have yet to enroll in the GWR will get this targeted examination initially. They will also receive a chest radiograph and pulmonary function testing. This evaluation will be repeated periodically (every year for examination and every 5 years for chest radiograph).

All of this testing can be done within the authority granted for the GWR, therefore the loss of treatment eligibility 5 years post discharge is not an issue. The Veterans Health Administration is working with the Veterans Benefits Administration to develop an expedited process for service connection for those individuals who have a history of exposure and health outcomes that are known to be related to hexavalent chromium.

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Once we have made these modifications to the GWR and have established the appropriate process for the involved VA medical centers, the Department will send letters to these soldiers explaining the new process and details regarding how they can get their examination.

I hope that this answers your questions regarding how VA is responding to this exposure event. Thank you for your continued support of our mission. A similar letter has been sent to the other co-signers of your letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric K. Shinseki". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "E".

Eric K. Shinseki

Enclosure

Fact Sheet

Veterans Exposed to Sodium Dichromate and included in Gulf War Registry

State	# Enrolled in Registry	#Total Reservists at Qarmat Ali	# Remaining
West Virginia	27	128	101
Oregon	20	292	272
South Carolina	7	146	139
Indiana	117	136	19

This information is current as of September 2009