



Diabetes is Now the Most Commonly-Paid Disability of Vietnam Veterans

Written On September 1, 2010 By [Bob Kraft](#)

The [Associated Press](#) reports that diabetes is now the most common illness or injury among Vietnam veterans drawing compensation benefits. The reason is a link between Agent Orange and diabetes, even though that link is a bit questionable. In fact, side effects of Agent Orange account for a very large percentage of all disability benefits paid by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The list of illnesses tied to Agent Orange have continued to grow ever since the government finally broke down and admitted that the defoliant was indeed toxic to humans. Here are excerpts from the AP article:

By his own reckoning, a Navy electrician spent just eight hours in Vietnam, during a layover on his flight back to the U.S. in 1966. He bought some cigarettes and snapped a few photos.

The jaunt didn't make for much of a war story, and there is no record it ever happened. But the man successfully argued that he may have been exposed to Agent Orange during his stopover and that it might have caused his diabetes — even though decades of research into the defoliant have failed to find more than a possibility that it causes the disease.

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Because of worries about Agent Orange, about 270,000 Vietnam veterans — more than one-quarter of the 1 million receiving disability checks — are getting compensation for diabetes, according to Department of Veterans Affairs records obtained by The Associated Press through the Freedom of Information Act.

More Vietnam veterans are being compensated for diabetes than for any other malady, including post-traumatic stress disorder, hearing loss or general wounds.

Agent Orange was a dioxin-laden defoliant that was sprayed over jungles to strip the Viet Cong of cover. American forces often got a soaking, too, and Agent Orange was later conclusively linked to several horrific health ailments, including cancers. So Congress and the VA set up a system to automatically award benefits to veterans who needed only to prove that they were in Vietnam at any time during a 13-year period and later got one of the illnesses connected to Agent Orange.

The VA, interpreting that 1991 law and studies that indicated potential associations, has over time added ailments that have no strong scientific link to Agent Orange. The nonprofit Institute of Medicine's biennial scientific analysis of available research, to which the VA looks for guidance, has repeatedly found only the possibility of a link between Agent Orange and diabetes, and that even a chance of a correlation is outweighed by factors such as family history, physical inactivity and obesity.

Disability benefits are a lot like workers' compensation, providing income to veterans who incurred ailments from their active-duty service. The benefits can last a lifetime even if the veteran holds a full-time job. They often transfer to surviving family members when a veteran dies of the disability. They are paid in addition to any medical, education and pension coverage that veterans receive.

Many veterans have a combination of ailments that are crunched in a formula to determine their benefits. This makes it difficult to determine how much is being spent solely on diabetes.

Most veterans get a 20 percent disability rating for diabetes, which amounts to about \$3,000 per year if it is their only ailment. Others get up to 100 percent. If each of the 270,000 Vietnam veterans got the minimum compensation for their diabetes, it would add up to \$850 million every year.

Congress gave the VA the ability to deem ailments “presumptive” — automatically awarded — because of exposure to Agent Orange. The VA did that for five illnesses for which the Institute of Medicine found “sufficient evidence of an association,” such as leukemia, non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma and soft-tissue cancers. Those illnesses have risen dramatically in both Vietnam and the U.S. since the war.

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