

Solano Veterans Scene – January, 2016

By Ted Puntillo, Veterans Services Director, Solano County

VA to provide benefits to vets exposed to water contaminants

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has announced it will begin a process that may allow veterans to receive disability pay if they were sickened by drinking water contaminated at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. Solano County veterans who may be affected by this decision can visit the Solano County Department of Veterans Services for more information on how to claim benefits.

The VA has provided health care or reimbursements for medical costs to veterans and their family members with illnesses related to exposure to water contaminated by solvents and fuels in the past, however, it has never given "presumptive status," before now – meaning they are considering service related disability compensation – for any condition.

The announcement may provide an opportunity for veterans to receive disability payments if they have experienced one or more of the following diseases, including kidney cancer, liver cancer, Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma, Leukemia, Multiple Myeloma, Scleroderma, Parkinson's Disease, Aplastic Anemia and other Myelodysplastic syndromes and served at Camp Lejeune between 1953 and 1987.

More than 750,000 people, including troops, family members and civilian employees, may have been exposed to volatile organic compounds and other chemicals like benzene and vinyl chloride found in the drinking water at the coastal Marine Corps base.

The Corps first publicly acknowledged the health growing health issue in 1985 when it notified residents in an enlisted housing area that trace amounts of contaminants had been found in their water. As it turns out, the pollution was far more extensive than originally thought, encompassing two major water treatment facilities that served the base and its surrounding housing areas for more than three decades.

In 2012 congress passed a law requiring the VA to provide health care for affected veterans and their families and to cover out-of-pocket costs for health conditions related to the toxic water. The VA's most recent announcement broadens this law, making it easier for vets and their families to gain access to the health care benefits to which they are entitled.

In addition to the benefits offered for the Camp Lejeune water contamination, the VA offers health care reimbursements to vets and their family members for illnesses including cancer, kidney and liver problems, infertility, miscarriage and birth defects.

If you think you may have been affected by the drinking water at Camp Lejeune, or, you are curious to see what benefits you may qualify for, please stop by my office and talk with me or one of my staff. We are happy to assist you with all of your service and benefit needs and thank you for your service to our country. Happy New Year.

Ted Puntillo is Director of Veteran's Services for Solano County. Reach him at (707) 784-6590 or tepuntillo@SolanoCounty.com. The Solano County Veteran's Services Office, 675 Texas St. in Fairfield, is open from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday.

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