

By Blake Hyfield

BURN PITS - THE NEXT AGENT ORANGE?

Burn pits were a common way to get rid of waste at military sites in Iraq and Afghanistan. Waste products in burn pits include, but are not limited to: chemicals, paint, medical and human waste, metal/aluminum cans, munitions and other unexploded ordnance, petroleum and lubricant products, plastics, rubber, wood, and discarded food. Burning waste in open air pits can cause more pollution than controlled burning, such as in an incinerator.

Possible Health Effects

Toxins in burn pit smoke may affect the skin, eyes, respiratory and cardiovascular systems, gastrointestinal tract and internal organs.

Veterans who were closer to burn pit smoke or exposed for longer periods may be at greater risk. Health effects depend on a number of other factors, such as the kind of waste being burned and wind direction.

Most of the irritation is temporary and resolves once the exposure is gone. This includes eye irritation and burning, coughing and throat irritation, breathing difficulties, and skin itching and rashes.

The high level of fine dust and pollution common in Iraq and Afghanistan may pose a greater danger for respiratory illnesses than exposure to burn pits, according to a 2011 Institute of Medicine report. That said, at this time the research does not show evidences of long-term health problems from exposure to burn pits. The VA continues to study the health of deployed veterans.

VA Registry Available

If you are concerned about your exposure to burn pits, talk to your health care provider or contact your local VA Environmental Health Coordinator to help you get more information from a health care provider. You can sign up of the VA's Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit registry which allows eligible Veterans and service members to document their exposures and report health concerns through an on-line questionnaire.

<https://veteran.mobilehealth.va.gov/AHBurnPitRegistry/#page/home>

Eligible Veterans and service members include those who served in:

- Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn
- Djibouti, Africa on or after September 11, 2001
- Operations Desert Shield or Desert Storm
- Southwest Asia theater of operations on or after August 2, 1990

Note: This information was taken from VA websites.

