

### AGENT ORANGE REGISTRY (AOR) PROGRAM

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) directive outlines the policy and procedures for the Agent Orange Registry (AOR) Program.
- 2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES:** This revised directive incorporates the content of expired VHA Handbook 1302.01, removes information not related to the AOR, and revises responsibilities for the management of the AOR Program.
- 3. RELATED ISSUES:** None.
- 4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Chief Consultant, Post Deployment Health Services (10P4Q) is responsible for the content of this directive. General questions about protocol may be addressed to Post Deployment Health Services at 202-461-1020.
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** VHA Handbook 1302.01, dated September 5, 2006 and VHA Directive 1302, dated September 29, 2000, are rescinded.
- 6. RECERTIFICATION:** This VHA directive is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working day of December 2021. This VHA directive will continue to serve as national VHA policy until it is recertified or rescinded.

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Under Secretary for Health

**DISTRIBUTION:** Emailed to the VHA Publications Distribution List on December 8, 2016.

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## AGENT ORANGE REGISTRY (AOR) PROGRAM

### 1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) directive outlines the procedures related to the maintenance of the Agent Orange Registry (AOR) program regarding health evaluations for Veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam between January 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975, certain Veterans who served in Korea or Thailand, or any United States (U.S.) Veterans who may have been exposed to dioxin or other toxic substance in an herbicide or defoliant during the conduct of, or as the result of, the testing, transporting, or spraying of herbicides for military purposes. The AOR exam alerts Veterans to possible long-term health problems that may be related to Agent Orange (AO) exposure during their military service. The registry data helps the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) understand and respond to these health problems more effectively. **AUTHORITY:** 38 U.S.C. 527, 38 U.S.C. 1116, Pub. L. 102-585 Section 703, and Pub. L. 100-687.

### 2. BACKGROUND

a. In 1978, VA established the AOR in response to Vietnam Veterans' concerns about the health effects of exposure. The registry was also initiated as a potential way to increase Vietnam Veterans' referral access to VA health care and other services. Among the approximately 3.4 million Veterans who deployed to Southeast Asia (about 2.7 million to Vietnam), over 650,000 have received an AOR exam to date.

b. AOR exams are:

(1) Free to eligible Veterans, and without a co-payment under the authorities of Public Law (Pub. L.) 102-585 Section 703 in 1992 and Pub. L. 100-687, the Veterans' Judicial Review Act of 1988.

(2) Not a disability compensation exam or required for other VA benefits. Enrollment in VA's health care system is not necessary.

(3) Based on Veterans' recollection of service, not on their military records.

(4) Will not confirm exposure to Agent Orange.

(5) Veterans can receive additional registry exams, if new problems develop.

(6) Veterans' family members are not eligible for an Agent Orange Registry health exam.

### 3. DEFINITIONS

a. **Agent Orange (AO)**. AO is a blend of tactical herbicides the U.S. military sprayed from 1962 to 1971 during Operation Ranch Hand in the Vietnam War to remove trees and dense tropical foliage that provided enemy cover.

b. **Agent Orange Registry (AOR)**. The AOR is a computerized index of Veteran participants, and the coded findings of the Agent Orange Program physical examinations, including related diagnostic results. This AOR is managed centrally by the Post Deployment Health Service (PDHS) in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Central Office and entered into a database by the Austin Automation Center (AAC).

c. **Austin Automation Center (AAC)**. The AAC, Austin, TX, is the location of the Agent Orange Registry database.

d. **Post Deployment Health Service (PDHS)**. The PDHS, VA Central Office coordinates and monitors all VHA activities, research and otherwise, relating to the Agent Orange issue. All policy and clinical questions relating to the potential effects of herbicides must be referred to PDHS.

e. **Herbicide**. An herbicide is a substance or preparation used to destroy vegetation.

f. **Tetrachlorodibenzo-para-dioxin (TCDD)-2,3,7,8**. TCDD is an abbreviation for a specific dioxin which was an impurity or contaminate, created in the manufacturing process for producing Agent Orange. This contaminate of some herbicides was used in the Republic of Vietnam, on a strip of land just south of the demilitarized zone (DMZ) and north of the Civilian Control Line in Korea, and in other locations during the conduct of, or as a result of, the testing, transporting, or spraying of herbicides for military purposes.

#### 4. POLICY

It is VHA policy to make available an Agent Orange Registry Examination to all eligible Veterans within 30 calendar days from the date the Veteran wishes to be seen and reporting in accordance with this directive.

#### 5. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. **Chief Consultant, Post Deployment Health Services**. Post-Deployment Health Services is the system owner and is responsible for the data contained in the registry. The Agent Orange Registry is maintained by the Austin Information Technology Center (AITC) in Austin, Texas under the auspices of VA, VHA, and the Post Deployment Health Service. The VHA PCS Post Deployment Health Services is responsible for coordinating and monitoring all VHA population health activities (e.g., clinical care, outreach, clinical and epidemiologic research) relating to AO Veterans' illnesses.

b. **VA Medical Facility Director**. The VA medical facility director is responsible for:

(1) Ensuring that examinations are conducted within 30 calendar days from the date the Veteran wishes to be seen, unless the Veteran requests otherwise. If a VA medical facility fails to meet the appointment scheduling time standard, the VA medical facility Director must explore alternatives, e.g., referrals to other VA medical facilities,

additional staff hours to perform these examinations, and/or the use of non-VA care providers or contractors to perform some or all examinations to bring the medical facility into compliance with the time standard.

c. **Facility Lead Environmental Health (EH) Clinician.** The Facility Environmental Health Clinician is responsible for:

(1) Serving in an advisory capacity for the AO Program's clinical management.

(2) Engaging primary care services at the facility level to ensure primary care teams are aware of registry programs and EH Clinician subject matter expertise.

(3) Serving as the primary care provider to the Veteran, until referral to a primary care clinician has been assigned, when a follow-up examination is recommended by the EH Clinician.

(4) Advising the Veteran of all aspects of the AO examination, including the purpose of the examination and its limitations.

(5) Informing the Veteran that the information supplied by the Veteran and the medical data obtained during the examination allows VHA to track patient demographics, medical diagnosis, and related medical data for workload analysis to assist in budget planning and possibly generating hypotheses for future research studies. Informing the Veteran that by participating in the registry, the Veteran is consenting for the use and disclosure of information outside of VA to Federal, State, and local government agencies as stated in the Notice of Systems of VA Records , 105VA131, published in the Federal Register in accordance with the Privacy Act of 1974. This Notice is available at <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2001/01/16/01-1113/privacy-act-of-1974-system-of-records>. **NOTE:** For information about the privacy and release of information regarding the Veteran's medical information in general, the clinician and/or Veteran may refer to VHA Handbook 1605.04 at: [http://www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub\\_ID=3147](http://www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=3147).

(6) Providing the initial and any follow up registry examination. The AO exam does not need to be repeated in the future unless there is a change in the Veteran's health status.

(7) Completing all reporting requirements, then reviewing and reporting the worksheet data to the AO database (see paragraph 6.(1)).

(8) Preparing and Signing Follow-up Letter:

(a) The EH Clinician must ensure that an appropriate personalized follow-up letter, explaining the results of the examination and laboratory studies, has been signed and mailed to the veteran. It is essential that this letter be written in language that can be easily understood by the veteran. Inappropriate wording could unduly alarm or confuse

the veteran. A great deal of sensitivity and care must be exercised in the preparation of this correspondence.

(b) Follow-up letters must be mailed to the veteran within 2 weeks of the initial examination appointment. Letter templates may be found in appendices A and B.

d. **Facility Lead Environmental Health (EH) Coordinator.** The Facility Lead Environment Health Coordinator is responsible for:

(1) Ensuring that each Veteran is provided an oral explanation of the purposes of the examination and the examination process and responding to any questions the Veteran might have.

(2) Ensuring appointments are scheduled.

(3) If numerous consultations are required for the examination, attempt to schedule them on the same day. When it is not possible to provide all consultations on the same day, the EH Coordinator or the scheduler must work with the Veteran and consultants to minimize the number of disruptions to the Veteran's schedule.

(4) Completing the AOR Worksheet.

(5) Establishing and updating the Consolidated Health Record (CHR) and/or Computerized Patient Record System (CPRS).

(6) Monitoring timeframe compliance. **NOTE:** *Changes in the appointment of EH Coordinators must be communicated to Post Deployment Health Services through the identified Network Lead Environmental Health Coordinator within 10 business days of the date of the change.*

## 6. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

The registry worksheets for registry examinations must be entered into the registry database at: <http://vaww.registries.aac.va.gov/eas> (**NOTE:** *This is an internal VA Web site that is not available to the public*) no later than 10 business days following the date of the registry examination. Required registry data must be obtained from the Veteran or family and entered into the AOR dataset via the Austin Information Technology Center (AITC) registry intranet Web site at <http://vaww.registries.aac.va.gov>. **NOTE:** *This is an internal VA Web site that is not available to the public.*

## 7. RECORDS CONTROL AND RETENTION

### a. **Records Control.**

(1) If a Veteran receives an AOR examination and a medical record for this Veteran does not exist, the Environmental Health Coordinator or Clinician must ensure one is established in the CHR and/or Computerized Patient Record System (CPRS).

(2) The Veteran's current address must be updated and maintained in the Veteran's electronic health record and in the Veterans Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture (VistA) computerized information system.

b. **Records Retention.** AOR examination documents become part of the patient's CHR and/or CPRS (e.g., medical records) and must be retained. These records include:

- (1) Completed AOR worksheets.
- (2) Dated follow-up letters.
- (3) Progress notes.
- (4) Ancillary test reports.
- (5) Any other documentation that may have been part of an AOR examination.

***NOTE:*** *At the present time Veterans Health Administration (VHA) registries, including the AOR, are considered permanent records and may not be destroyed. The disposition schedules for these records are pending National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) approval. Once approved, the new schedules will be provided to the VHA Records Officer and program office.*

## 8. REFERENCES

- a. Pub. L. 102-585 Section 703.
- b. Pub. L. 100-687.
- c. 38 U.S.C. 527.
- d. 38 U.S.C. 1116.
- e. Agent Orange Information:  
<http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/index.asp>
- f. EAS Registries Data Entry and User's Guide (Austin Information Technology Center/AITC): <http://vaww.registries.AAC.va.gov>. ***NOTE:*** *This is an internal VA Web site that is not available to the public.*
- g. Environmental Health Coordinators List:  
<http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp>
- h. Institute of Medicine (IOM) Reports on Agent Orange:  
<http://www.nationalacademies.org/hmd/>

- i. Talent Management System (TMS) Web-Based Trainings:  
<https://www.tms.va.gov>

**SAMPLE FOLLOW-UP LETTER FOR A POSSIBLE MEDICAL CONDITON FOR  
VETERANS WITH POSSIBLE AGENT ORANGE EXPOSURE.**

(Date)

(Name/Address)

Dear (Name):

You recently completed an Agent Orange Health Registry exam through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). This helps us serve you and other Veterans who are concerned about health problems that might have resulted from military service.

The results of your exam and/or lab tests showed the need for a follow up appointment. We have scheduled an appointment for you with your VA health care provider to discuss the findings. If you cannot keep this appointment, please call (phone number) as soon as possible.

If you have questions or concerns about your exam, please contact the Environmental Health Coordinator at (phone number). If you see a provider outside of VA, please provide VA with any additional health care information. Remember, this exam does not start a claim for VA benefits. If you want to file a claim, contact your nearest VA Regional Office at (address). Their telephone number is (phone number).

You are now automatically included in our Agent Orange Health Registry and will get updates from VA when there is new information.

We hope this information is helpful to you. Thank you for your service to this country and for taking part in the Agent Orange Health Registry exam.

Sincerely,

Signature

Name with Degree(s)

Title (for example) Environmental Health Clinician

Location

Contact – e-mail and/or phone number

**SAMPLE AGENT ORANGE FOLLOW-UP LETTER (NO MEDICAL PROBLEMS FOR  
VETERANS EXPOSED TO AGENT ORANGE OR OTHER HERBICIDES)**

(Date)

(Name/Address)

Dear (Name):

You recently completed an Agent Orange Health Registry exam through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

The results of your exam and lab tests did not show medical issues that relate to possible exposure to herbicides. At this the examination did not reveal a condition resulting from service in locations where military herbicides were used.

Although the results of your exam and lab tests did not show a medical condition at this time, if you believe you do have a medical condition in the future, I encourage you to seek help from your nearest VA medical center or outpatient clinic. You may reach us at telephone number (phone number). You may also call a Veterans Benefits Representative at 1-800-827-1000. Agent Orange information is also available at VA's website, <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/index.asp>.

If you see a provider outside of the VA about your health problems, please have the provider provide VA with any additional health care information.

We hope this information is helpful to you. Thank you for your service to this country and for taking part in the Agent Orange Health Registry exam.

Sincerely,

Signature

Name with Degree(s)

Title (for example) Environmental Health Clinician

Location

Contact – e-mail and/or phone number