

Get help from Veterans Crisis Line

LOCATOR

CONTACT

SEARCH

U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

(https://www.va.gov)

VA (<http://www.va.gov/>) » Health Care (<http://www.va.gov/health>) » Public Health (</index.asp>) » Military Exposures (</PUBLICHEALTH/exposures/index.asp>) » Sand, Dust and Particulates

Public Health

MENU

Sand, Dust and Particulates

Veterans who were deployed to the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan and other dusty environments were often exposed to sand, dust, pollution and other airborne particles.

Larger particles such as sand may become trapped in the nose and throat but can be expelled by coughing or sneezing.

Very small, fine particles (particulates) may cause more serious health problems because they can be inhaled deep into the lungs and airways.

These extremely small particles and liquid droplets can include acids, chemicals, metals, soil or dust.

Join the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry to create a snapshot of your health and help us learn more about potential health effects. Check your eligibility and sign up (<https://veteran.mobilehealth.va.gov/AHBurnPitRegistry>) through an online questionnaire.



Health concerns?

If you are concerned about your exposure to sand, dust, or particulates, talk to your health care provider or contact your local VA Environmental Health Coordinator (</exposures/coordinators.asp>) to help you get more information from a health care provider.

VA health care is available to all combat Veterans for conditions possibly related to service for five years after discharge. Not enrolled in the VA health care system? Apply online (<http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/apply/>).

Particulate matter pollution in Iraq and Afghanistan

Although particulate matter (PM) emissions from natural and man-made sources are found worldwide, PM levels in Southwest Asia are naturally higher. Primary sources of PM in Southwest Asia include dust storms, vehicle exhaust, construction sites, farming, and emissions from local industries.

The use of burn pits for waste management (</exposures/burnpits/index.asp>) increased the naturally high concentrations of PM in Iraq and Afghanistan. Air sampling performed at Joint Base Balad, Iraq (the large Balad burn pit operated there and was shut down in 2009) detected increased particulate matter and infrequently some chemicals, which may have been due to the industry in Iraq.

Naval Air Facility in Atsugi, Japan

From 1985 to 2001, personnel at Naval Air Facility (NAF) Atsugi in Atsugi, Japan were exposed to environmental contaminants from an off-base waste incinerator. Learn more about the Atsugi waste incinerator (</exposures/sand-dust-particulates/atsugi.asp>) chemical emissions and the investigation of health effects. Atsugi, Japan is not included in the list of eligible locations for the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry.

Health effects of sand, dust and PM exposure

Most studies relate particulate matter (PM) exposure data to respiratory and cardiopulmonary health effects in specific, susceptible groups such as young children, the elderly, and people with existing asthma or cardiopulmonary disease.

Many variables influence the nature and probability of health problems:

- Size of the PM (Smaller particles are considered more harmful because of easier passage through the nose and throat to enter the lungs.)
- Chemical make-up of the PM
- Concentration levels
- Duration of exposure
- Human factors including age, health status, existing medical conditions, and genetics

Symptoms of sand, dust and particulate exposure include irritation of the eyes, nose, throat, and skin. Other symptoms include cold or flu-like symptoms such as cough, runny nose, and shortness of breath. Learn more from the Department of Defense (https://phc.amedd.army.mil/PHC%20Resource%20Library/Particulate_Matter_Factsheet_64-009-0414.pdf#). (83 KB, PDF)

VA continues to study the health of deployed Veterans.

Compensation benefits for health problems

Veterans may file a claim for disability compensation for health problems they believe are related to sand, dust and particulate exposure during military service. VA decides these claims on a case-by-case basis. File a claim online (<https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/>).

Learn more about VA benefits (</exposures/benefits/index.asp>).

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RESOURCES

[Burn Pits \(/exposures/burnpits/index.asp\)](/exposures/burnpits/index.asp)

[Atsugi Waste Incinerator \(/exposures/sand-dust-particulates/atsugi.asp\)](/exposures/sand-dust-particulates/atsugi.asp)

Particulate Matter (U.S. Army) (PDF)

(https://phc.amedd.army.mil/PHC%20Resource%20Library/Particulate_Matter_Factsheet_64-009-0414.pdf#)

CONTACT

Health Care

877-222-8387

Benefits

800-827-1000

TDD (Hearing Impaired)

800-829-4833

CONNECT

Veterans Crisis Line: (<https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>)

1-800-273-8255 (tel:+18002738255) (Press 1)

Social Media



(<https://publichealth.va.gov/exposures/sand-dust-particulates/you-and-your-affairs/>)
Complete Directory (<https://www.va.gov/opa/socialmedia.asp>)

EMAIL UPDATES

Signup

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QUICK LIST

RESOURCES

ADMINISTRATION

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs | 810 Vermont Avenue, NW Washington DC 20420

Last updated July 12, 2018