

Panama Veterans Herbicide Relief Act

Introduction:

The Panama Veterans Herbicide Relief Act (PVHRA), would grant presumptive herbicide exposure status to veterans who served in or near the Panama Canal Zone (PCZ) between January 1, 1958 and December 31, 1999, or when the last military personnel departed from their official duty in the Panama Canal Zone. This would enable eligible veterans to receive benefits if they suffer from any of the diseases the VA has linked to herbicide exposure.

Background:

The U.S. Census Bureau Commodities by Country show 2,4-D & 2,4,5-T shipped, stored and used in Panama from 1958 until at least December 1977. This chemical, produced and shipped from 1958-1964, was code named "Agent Purple" with a higher dioxin content (30-50 PPM TCDD), whereas shipments from 1965-1977 were to have a lower dioxin content closer to 0.5 code named "Agent Orange."

As outlined in the DOD Herbicide Manual, TM 5-629, these herbicides were used routinely as needed on base. 2,4-D & 2,4,5-T was used to kill poison ivy, poison oak and sumac where troops were deployed. See page 34, 3-7. Silvex was used on golf courses, parade fields and gun ranges. See page 41, 3-6. As well as many other persistent pesticides harmful to man as listed in this Tri-service manual to be used on every base as needed. Silvex also contains 2,4,5-T and the by-product Dioxin (TCDD).

Why this legislation is needed:

The VA refuses to provide benefits to veterans of service in the Panama Canal Zone (PCZ) because they incorrectly claim that herbicide was not used in the PCZ. Despite the fact that many veterans have developed illnesses consistent with herbicide exposure, the VA continuously denies these claims.

The legislation:

This bill allows for presumptive coverage similar to the coverage for those who served in Vietnam, along the Korean DMZ and on the base perimeters in Thailand. Unfortunately, proving exposure is nearly impossible due to a lack of record keeping and the inability to know the precise location of spraying. What records exist corroborate the presence of herbicide in the PCZ during the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's.

Important items related to the PVHRA:

Compensation: Title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting a provision covering the PCZ.

Health Care: Section 1710(e)(4) of such title is amended by inserting a provision covering veterans of the CZ.

Cost: This bill has not been scored by CBO