



**For Immediate Release
Monday, Sept. 14, 2020**

**MILITARY-VETERANS ADVOCACY STATEMENT ON
RELEASE OF NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCE
ENGINEERING AND MEDICINE REPORT ON RESPIRATORY
HEALTH EFFECTS OF AIRBORNE HAZARDS EXPOSURES IN
THE SOUTHWEST ASIA THEATER OF MILITARY
OPERATIONS.**

Louisiana based Military-Veterans Advocacy (MVA) expressed disappointments at the National Academy of Science Engineering and Medicine report, released on September 11, 2020. The report was commissioned by the Department of Veterans Affairs to determine if there was an association between airborne hazards from open air burn pits in Southwest Asia and certain cancers as well as respiratory diseases. The report identified 27 potential diseases suffered by veterans that might be associated with airborne hazards. The findings of the NASEM report failed to find a positive association between the airborne hazards of open air burn pits and any of these illnesses.

Commander John B. Wells, USN (retired), MVA Chairman of the Board, in questioning the conclusions of the report, said: "It is inconceivable to me that we can send 30-somethings in great physical condition to Iraq and Afghanistan, have them return with breathing difficulties, and dismiss airborne hazards from burn pits as the cause."

Wells questioned the scientific approach of the Committee noting that it did not quantify whether Southwest Asia veterans had a higher level of disease incidence than those who did not deploy or the general public. He also noted that there was no rational attempt to eliminate other causes.

"NASEM tried to blame cigarette smoking as a possible cause of these illnesses," Wells said, "but that is just speculation. In 2018, the FDA noted that only 21.6% of veterans are smokers which is lower than the population at large. The Committee did not determine whether those suffering from these diseases were smokers."

"The unanswered question," Wells continued, "was whether the airborne particles found in the smoke from burn pits was sufficient to trigger these diseases. We believe the answer to that question is a resounding yes."

The NASEM did recommend further studies and found limited association chronic persistent cough, shortness of breath (dyspnea), and/or wheezing, however this criteria is probably not sufficient to meet the VA standards for coverage.

Senator Thom Tillis of North Carolina has introduced legislation to help correct the problem and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand of New York is expected to introduce stronger legislation later this week. MVA supports both bills.

"Burn pits are the Agent Orange of the 21st Century," Wells said. "We need to provide coverage for these victims now."

Over 3.7 million members of the Armed Forces deployed to Southwest Asia since 2001.

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Military-Veterans Advocacy is a tax exempt non-profit corporation based in Slidell, Louisiana. For more information please go to www.militaryveteransadvocacy.org

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