

117TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# H. R. 2372

To amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for a presumption of service connection for certain diseases associated with exposure to toxins, and for other purposes.

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## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APRIL 5, 2021

Mr. RUIZ (for himself, Mr. FITZPATRICK, and Mr. SUOZZI) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and in addition to the Committee on Education and Labor, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

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## A BILL

To amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for a presumption of service connection for certain diseases associated with exposure to toxins, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Presumptive Benefits  
5 for War Fighters Exposed to Burn Pits and Other Toxins  
6 Act of 2021”.

1 **SEC. 2. PRESUMPTION OF SERVICE CONNECTION FOR CER-**  
2 **TAIN DISEASES ASSOCIATED WITH EXPO-**  
3 **SURE TO BURN PITS AND OTHER TOXINS.**

4 (a) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter II of chapter 11 of  
5 title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the  
6 end the following new section:

7 **“§ 1119. Presumption of service connection for cer-**  
8 **tain diseases associated with exposure to**  
9 **burn pits and other toxins**

10 “(a) PRESUMPTION OF SERVICE CONNECTION.—(1)  
11 For the purposes of section 1110 of this title, and subject  
12 to section 1113 of this title, a disease specified in para-  
13 graph (2) becoming manifest in a veteran described in  
14 paragraph (3) shall be considered to have been incurred  
15 in or aggravated during active military, naval, or air serv-  
16 ice, notwithstanding that there is no record of evidence  
17 of such disease during the period of such service.

18 “(2) The diseases specified in this paragraph are the  
19 following:

20 “(A) Asthma that was diagnosed after service  
21 in a country or territory for which a medal described  
22 in paragraph (3) was awarded.

23 “(B)(i) Head cancer of any type.

24 “(ii) Neck cancer of any type.

25 “(iii) Respiratory cancer of any type.

26 “(iv) Gastrointestinal cancer of any type.

1 “(v) Pancreatic cancer of any type.

2 “(vi) Reproductive cancer of any type.

3 “(vii) Lymphoma cancer of any type.

4 “(viii) Lymphomatic cancer of any type.

5 “(ix) Kidney cancer.

6 “(x) Brain cancer.

7 “(xi) Melanoma.

8 “(C) Chronic bronchitis.

9 “(D) Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

10 “(E) Constrictive bronchiolitis or obliterative  
11 bronchiolitis.

12 “(F) Emphysema.

13 “(G) Granulomatous disease.

14 “(H) Interstitial lung disease.

15 “(I) Pleuritis.

16 “(J) Pulmonary fibrosis.

17 “(K) Sarcoidosis.

18 “(L) Any other disease listed under subsection  
19 (a)(2) of section 1116 of this title or for which a  
20 presumption of service connection is warranted pur-  
21 suant to regulations prescribed under section sub-  
22 section (b)(1) of such section.

23 “(M) Any other disease with respect to which  
24 final regulations have been prescribed under sub-  
25 section (c)(3).

1 “(3) A veteran described in this paragraph is any vet-  
 2 eran who on or after August 2, 1990, was awarded any  
 3 of the following:

4 “(A) The Afghanistan Campaign Medal.

5 “(B) The Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal.

6 “(C) The Armed Forces Reserve Medal with M-  
 7 device.

8 “(D) The Armed Forces Service Medal.

9 “(E) The Global War On Terrorism Expedi-  
 10 tionary Medal.

11 “(F) The Inherent Resolve Campaign Medal.

12 “(G) The Iraqi Campaign Medal.

13 “(H) The Southwest Asia Service Medal.

14 “(b) PROCESS TO ADD DISEASES THROUGH WRIT-  
 15 TEN PETITION.—(1) In the case that the Secretary re-  
 16 ceives a written petition from an interested party to add  
 17 a disease to the list of diseases specified in subsection  
 18 (a)(2), not later than 90 days after the date of receipt  
 19 of such petition, the Secretary shall request a determina-  
 20 tion by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering,  
 21 and Medicine (referred to in this section as the ‘National  
 22 Academies’) with respect to whether there is a positive as-  
 23 sociation between—

24 “(A) the exposure of humans to one or more  
 25 covered toxins; and

1 “(B) the occurrence of the disease in humans.

2 “(2) For purposes of this subsection, the term ‘inter-  
3 ested party’ includes a representative of—

4 “(A) a congressionally chartered veterans serv-  
5 ice organization;

6 “(B) an organization that—

7 “(i) is described in section 501(c)(3) of the  
8 Internal Revenue Code of 1986 and exempt  
9 from taxation under section 501(a) of such  
10 Code;

11 “(ii) serves veterans or members of the  
12 Armed Forces; and

13 “(iii) has continuously operated for a pe-  
14 riod of five years or more preceding the date of  
15 the submittal of the written petition under  
16 paragraph (1);

17 “(C) a collective bargaining agent for civilian  
18 employees of the United States Government;

19 “(D) a nationally recognized medical associa-  
20 tion;

21 “(E) the National Academies; or

22 “(F) a State or political subdivision of a State.

23 “(c) DETERMINATIONS BY NATIONAL ACADEMIES.—

24 (1) If the Secretary receives a determination described in

1 paragraph (2), not later than 180 days after receipt of  
2 such determination, the Secretary shall—

3 “(A) publish in the Federal Register proposed  
4 regulations to add the disease covered by the deter-  
5 mination to the list of diseases specified in sub-  
6 section (a)(2);

7 “(B) publish in the Federal Register, and sub-  
8 mit to the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the  
9 Senate and the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of  
10 the House of Representatives—

11 “(i) the decision of the Secretary not to  
12 publish such proposed regulations; and

13 “(ii) the basis for such decision, including  
14 specific medical science refuting the determina-  
15 tion; or

16 “(C) publish in the Federal Register a decision  
17 that insufficient evidence exists to take action under  
18 subparagraph (A) or (B).

19 “(2) A determination described in this paragraph—

20 “(A) is a determination by the National Acad-  
21 emies that there is a positive association between—

22 “(i) the exposure of humans to one or  
23 more covered toxins; and

24 “(ii) the occurrence of the disease in hu-  
25 mans; and

1 “(B) may be made pursuant to—

2 “(i) a request from the Secretary under  
3 subsection (b); or

4 “(ii) an agreement between the Secretary  
5 and the National Academies under section 3 of  
6 the Presumptive Benefits for War Fighters Ex-  
7 posed to Burn Pits and Other Toxins Act of  
8 2021.

9 “(3)(A) Not later than 180 days after the date on  
10 which the Secretary publishes any proposed regulations  
11 under paragraph (1)(A) for a disease, the Secretary shall  
12 prescribe final regulations for that disease.

13 “(B) Such regulations shall be effective on the date  
14 of issuance.

15 “(d) REFERENCE TO NATIONAL ACADEMIES.—In the  
16 case that the Secretary enters into an agreement with an-  
17 other organization as described in section 3(h)(1) of the  
18 Presumptive Benefits for War Fighters Exposed to Burn  
19 Pits and Other Toxins Act of 2021, any reference in this  
20 section to the National Academies shall be treated as a  
21 reference to the other organization.

22 “(e) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

23 “(1) The term ‘covered toxin’ includes the fol-  
24 lowing:

25 “(A) Any toxic chemical or toxic fume.

1 “(B) Hazardous waste, mixed waste, solid  
2 waste, or used oil (as those terms are defined  
3 in section 1004 of the Solid Waste Disposal Act  
4 (42 U.S.C. 6903)).

5 “(C) Radiological waste.

6 “(D) Any other carcinogen.

7 “(2) The term ‘veterans service organization’  
8 means an organization recognized by the Secretary  
9 for the representation of veterans under section  
10 5902 of this title.”.

11 (b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—

12 (1) IN GENERAL.—The amendment made by  
13 subsection (a) shall take effect on the date that is  
14 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

15 (2) WRITTEN PETITIONS.—With respect to a  
16 written petition described in section 1119(b)(1) of  
17 title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection  
18 (a), that was received by the Secretary of Veterans  
19 Affairs before the effective date described in para-  
20 graph (1), the Secretary shall make a request of the  
21 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and  
22 Medicine under such section, as so added, not later  
23 than 90 days after such effective date.

24 (c) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections  
25 at the beginning of chapter 11 of title 38, United States



1 Code, is amended by inserting after the item relating to  
 2 section 1118 the following new item:

“1119. Presumption of service connection for certain diseases associated with  
 exposure to burn pits and other toxins.”.

3 (d) CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—Section 1113 of  
 4 such title is amended by striking “or 1118” each place  
 5 it appears and inserting “1118, or 1119”.

6 **SEC. 3. AGREEMENT WITH THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES OF**  
 7 **SCIENCES, ENGINEERING, AND MEDICINE**  
 8 **CONCERNING THE EXPOSURE OF HUMANS TO**  
 9 **BURN PITS AND OTHER TOXINS.**

10 (a) AGREEMENT.—

11 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans  
 12 Affairs shall seek to enter into an agreement with  
 13 the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering,  
 14 and Medicine (referred to in this section as the “Na-  
 15 tional Academies”) to perform the services covered  
 16 by this section.

17 (2) TIMING.—The Secretary shall seek to enter  
 18 into the agreement described in paragraph (1) not  
 19 later than 60 days after the date of the enactment  
 20 of this Act.

21 (b) REVIEWS OF SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE.—

22 (1) IN GENERAL.—Under an agreement be-  
 23 tween the Secretary and the National Academies,  
 24 the National Academies shall review and summarize

1 the scientific evidence, and assess the strength there-  
2 of, concerning the association between the exposure  
3 of humans to covered toxins and each disease sus-  
4 pected to be associated with such exposure.

5 (2) REVIEWS UPON REQUEST.—Under an  
6 agreement between the Secretary and the National  
7 Academies under this section, the National Acad-  
8 emies shall conduct a review described in paragraph  
9 (1) in response to each request made by the Sec-  
10 retary under section 1119(b)(1) of title 38, United  
11 States Code, as added by section 2(a).

12 (c) SCIENTIFIC DETERMINATIONS CONCERNING DIS-  
13 EASES.—

14 (1) IN GENERAL.—For each disease reviewed  
15 under subsection (b), the National Academies shall  
16 determine (to the extent that available scientific data  
17 permit meaningful determinations) whether there is  
18 a positive association between the exposure of hu-  
19 mans to one or more covered toxins and the occur-  
20 rence of the disease in humans, taking into account  
21 the strength of the scientific evidence and the appro-  
22 priateness of the statistical and epidemiological  
23 methods used to detect the association.

24 (2) SUBMISSIONS FOR REVIEWS UPON RE-  
25 QUEST.—Under an agreement between the Secretary

1 and the National Academies under this section, not  
2 later than 270 days after the date on which the Sec-  
3 retary transmits a request to the National Acad-  
4 emies with respect to a disease under section  
5 1119(b)(1) of title 38, United States Code, as added  
6 by section 2(a), the National Academies shall submit  
7 to the Secretary the determination made with re-  
8 spect to that disease under paragraph (1).

9 (d) RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDITIONAL SCI-  
10 ENTIFIC STUDIES.—

11 (1) IN GENERAL.—Under an agreement be-  
12 tween the Secretary and the National Academies  
13 under this section, the National Academies shall  
14 make any recommendations it has for additional sci-  
15 entific studies to resolve areas of continuing sci-  
16 entific uncertainty relating to the exposure of hu-  
17 mans to covered toxins.

18 (2) CONSIDERATIONS.—In making rec-  
19 ommendations for additional scientific studies, the  
20 National Academies shall consider—

21 (A) the scientific information that is avail-  
22 able at the time of the recommendation;

23 (B) the value and relevance of the informa-  
24 tion that could result from additional studies;  
25 and

1 (C) the feasibility of carrying out such ad-  
2 ditional studies.

3 (e) SUBSEQUENT REVIEWS.—Under an agreement  
4 between the Secretary and the National Academies under  
5 this section, the National Academies shall—

6 (1) conduct as comprehensive a review as is  
7 practicable of the evidence referred to in subsection  
8 (b)(1) that became available since the last review of  
9 such evidence under this section; and

10 (2) make determinations and estimates on the  
11 basis of the results of such review and all other re-  
12 views conducted for the purposes of this section.

13 (f) REPORTS.—

14 (1) INITIAL REPORT.—

15 (A) IN GENERAL.—Under an agreement  
16 between the Secretary and the National Acad-  
17 emies under this section, not later than 540  
18 days after the date of the enactment of this  
19 Act, the National Academies shall submit to the  
20 Secretary and the Committee on Veterans' Af-  
21 fairs of the Senate and the Committee on Vet-  
22 erans' Affairs of the House of Representatives  
23 a report on the activities of the National Acad-  
24 emies under the agreement.

1 (B) ELEMENTS.—The report submitted  
2 under subparagraph (A) shall include the fol-  
3 lowing:

4 (i) The determinations described in  
5 subsection (c)(1).

6 (ii) An explanation of the scientific  
7 evidence and reasoning that led to such de-  
8 terminations.

9 (iii) Any recommendations of the Na-  
10 tional Academies under subsection (d).

11 (2) PERIODIC UPDATES.—Under an agreement  
12 between the Secretary and the National Academies  
13 under this section, not less frequently than once  
14 every two years, the National Academies shall sub-  
15 mit to the Secretary and the Committee on Vet-  
16 erans' Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on  
17 Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives an  
18 updated report on the activities of the National  
19 Academies under the agreement.

20 (g) LIMITATION ON AUTHORITY.—The authority to  
21 enter into agreements under this section shall be effective  
22 for a fiscal year to the extent that appropriations are  
23 available.

24 (h) ALTERNATIVE CONTRACT SCIENTIFIC ORGANIZA-  
25 TION.—

1           (1) IN GENERAL.—If the Secretary is unable  
2       within the period prescribed in subsection (a)(2) to  
3       enter into an agreement with the National Acad-  
4       emies on terms acceptable to the Secretary, the Sec-  
5       retary shall seek to enter into such an agreement  
6       with another appropriate scientific organization  
7       that—

8                   (A) is not part of the Government;

9                   (B) operates as a not-for-profit entity; and

10                  (C) has expertise and objectivity com-  
11       parable to that of the National Academies.

12           (2) TREATMENT.—If the Secretary enters into  
13       an agreement with another organization as described  
14       in paragraph (1), any reference in this section, sec-  
15       tion 4, and section 1119 of title 38, United States  
16       Code, as added by section 2(a), to the National  
17       Academies shall be treated as a reference to the  
18       other organization.

19           (i) COVERED TOXIN DEFINED.—In this section, the  
20       term “covered toxin” has the meaning given that term in  
21       section 1119(e) of title 38, United States Code, as added  
22       by section 2(a).

23           (j) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There  
24       are authorized to be appropriated to the Department of

1 Veterans Affairs such sums as may be necessary to carry  
2 out this section.

3 **SEC. 4. ACCESS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES OF**  
4 **SCIENCES, ENGINEERING, AND MEDICINE TO**  
5 **INFORMATION FROM FEDERAL AGENCIES.**

6 (a) IN GENERAL.—Upon request by the National  
7 Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (re-  
8 ferred to in this section as the “National Academies”),  
9 the head of any Federal agency with relevant information  
10 shall provide to the National Academies information in the  
11 possession of the agency that the National Academies de-  
12 termines useful in conducting a review under section 3(b).

13 (b) FEDERAL AGENCY DEFINED.—In this section,  
14 the term “Federal agency” means any agency as that term  
15 is defined in section 551 of title 5, United States Code.

16 **SEC. 5. PRESUMPTION RELATING TO PERSONAL INJURY OF**  
17 **CERTAIN FEDERAL EMPLOYEES.**

18 (a) IN GENERAL.—Section 8102 of title 5, United  
19 States Code, is amended by adding at the end the fol-  
20 lowing:

21 “(c)(1) In this subsection, the term ‘covered em-  
22 ployee’ means an employee of the Department of State,  
23 the Department of Defense, or an element of the intel-  
24 ligence community (as defined in section 3 of the National  
25 Security Act of 1947 (50 U.S.C. 3003)) who, on or after

1 August 2, 1990, carried out the job responsibilities of the  
2 employee for not fewer than 30 total days in a country  
3 or territory while the United States was conducting a con-  
4 tingency operation (as defined in section 101 of title 10)  
5 in that country or territory.

6 “(2) Disability or death from a disease described in  
7 paragraph (2) of such section suffered by a covered em-  
8 ployee is deemed to have resulted from personal injury  
9 sustained while in the performance of the duty of the cov-  
10 ered employee, whether or not the covered employee was  
11 engaged in the course of employment when the disability  
12 or disability resulting in death occurred.”.

13 (b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendment made by  
14 subsection (a) shall take effect on the date that is 180  
15 days after the date of enactment of this Act.

○