

What You Need to Know About the Blue Water Navy Benefits Law (MILITARY.COM 26 JUN 19) ... Patricia Kime

Veterans with one of 14 diseases presumed to be related to the herbicide Agent Orange and who served offshore or in the specified areas of the DMZ, can now file a disability claim with the Department of Veterans to receive benefits, thanks to a law enacted June 25.

H.R. 299 extends disability compensation to personnel who served off the coast of the Republic of Vietnam between Jan. 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975. It specifies that veterans must have served on a ship not more than 12 nautical miles off the coast. The expanse of territorial water covered begins on the southwestern demarcation line of Vietnam and Cambodia and runs through several points spelled out in the law.

According to Congress and the Department of Veterans Affairs, an estimated 90,000 veterans may be eligible for benefits under the law.

Those eligible include veterans with one or more of the presumptive diseases whose claims were previously denied. It also includes those with new claims.

If a veteran is not sure where their vessel was located, but they have one of the associated diseases, they should file a claim anyway -- and do it as soon as possible, according to John Wells, an attorney with Military-Veterans Advocacy.

Information on how to file a VA claim for Agent Orange exposure is available on the department's website. <https://www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/hazardous-materials-exposure/agent-orange/vietnam-waters/>

If a veteran has previously been denied and need help appealing their claim, they can get assistance from an accredited veteran's service organization.

Help is also available through the National Veterans Legal Services Program by email, bluewater2019@nvlsp.org or by phone, 855-333-0677.