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VETERANS SUPPORT GUIDE



MesotheliomaGuide

Restoring Hope for Mesothelioma Patients

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter from Retired LCDR Carl Jewett	3
Meet Carl Jewett.....	8
Veterans and Mesothelioma	9
VA Disability Compensation for Vets	12
Asbestos in the Military	16
Navy	16
Army.....	18
Air Force.....	19
Marine Corps.....	19
Coast Guard.....	20
At-Risk Military Occupations	21
Finding Treatment Options	22
Dr. Avi Lebenthal – VA Boston Healthcare System	22
Dr. Robert Cameron – West Los Angeles VA Medical Center.....	24
What’s Next?	26

3 THINGS THE VA ISN'T TELLING YOU

By Retired LCDR Carl Jewett

If you're a veteran with mesothelioma, you account for 1/3 of all patients. Many of you don't know your options, or have been misinformed regarding your VA benefits. Let's set the record straight.

As a retired U.S. Navy submariner of 24 years, I completely understand why many veterans want to steer clear of the VA. But I want to make sure these vets aren't missing out on available benefits because of an unwillingness to face what they perceive as a frustrating obstacle course, or fail to file a claim because they have been misinformed about their options.

With the right help, it's much easier to qualify and receive benefits than you realize. I'm here to dispel some common misconceptions about the VA and benefit eligibility for veterans with mesothelioma.

Here are three facts you need to know about disability compensation and benefits:

FACT #1

Most Veterans with Mesothelioma are Eligible for VA Disability Compensation (VADC)

If you are a veteran with mesothelioma, VA Disability Compensation is the greatest monetary benefit available to you.

This tax-free compensation starts at \$2,906 per month for single veterans and \$3,068 per month for married veterans. Additional compensation is available for veterans if they are in need of the regular Aid & Attendance of another person, or are housebound. Many veterans tell me that they tried to apply for VA benefits in the past, but didn't qualify because their income was too high. While there are some VA benefits that are means tested, VADC is not one of them, and eligibility is in no way based on your income.

The VA acknowledges that asbestos is the only known cause of mesothelioma. However, VA officials also require a detailed asbestos exposure summary with each claim in order to convince them that the veteran's mesothelioma is "service-related." I have helped hundreds of veterans get approved for disability compensation, and I can streamline the claims process, and help you write your exposure summary, so you get your claim approved quickly and easily.

FACT #2

The VA Has Two World-Renowned Mesothelioma Specialists

Many veterans are shocked to learn the VA has two of the best mesothelioma specialists and surgeons in the country. These doctors offer treatment through their respective VA hospitals that is on par with, or better than, treatment from most private hospitals.



Dr. Abraham Lebenthal,
Brigham and Women's Hospital (Boston)

Dr. Lebenthal's home base at Brigham and Women's Hospital (BWH) is one of the best mesothelioma treatment facilities in the country. He also heads the mesothelioma program at the Boston VA Hospital, which works in collaboration with BWH. Dr. Lebenthal is no stranger to military service. He served as a battalion physician in the Israeli Army. This gives him a better perspective and appreciation for U.S. veterans than your average doctor.



Dr. Robert Cameron,
UCLA Medical Center (Los Angeles)

For more than 20 years, Dr. Robert Cameron has made extensive contributions to the mesothelioma medical community. He developed a lung-saving surgery that has improved the lives of many mesothelioma patients. Dr. Cameron treats veterans through the Elmo Zumwalt Comprehensive Mesothelioma Center in the West Los Angeles VA Hospital.

Finding a mesothelioma specialist for your diagnosis is the best way to extend your survival time. All too often, doctors who aren't mesothelioma specialists misinform veterans about their treatment options. If you are a veteran with mesothelioma, and are already enrolled in the VA Health Care System, consider getting an e-consult with one of the VA's mesothelioma specialists. To find out how, call 844-VET-MESO or 844-838-6376.

FACT #3

Asbestos Exposure Doesn't Have to Be Service-Related

Too many vets write off the possibility of VA benefits because they are concerned their diagnosis isn't service-related. Many veterans have more exposure from their civilian occupation(s) than they did in the military.

Mesothelioma patients should be aware that they might still be eligible for VA benefits even if their disease isn't service-related. You may be entitled to benefits such as VA Pension and treatment through the Veterans Health Administration (with the specialists mentioned above).

If you are a veteran with mesothelioma, you are likely eligible to receive some form of VA compensation in the form of VADC or Pension. I'm happy to help you find out what benefits you're eligible for, and assist you in applying for those benefits.

Take Action – Get the Benefits You've Earned

Veterans make up the largest group of people diagnosed with mesothelioma because asbestos was so widely used in the armed forces. As a VA Accredited Claims Agent and a fellow veteran who served our country, I specialize in getting you the benefits you deserve.

Things to Remember:

- Most veterans with mesothelioma are eligible for VA Disability Compensation.
- As a veteran, you may be eligible for treatment by a specialist at the VA.
- There are benefits for veterans regardless of exposure history.

Veterans diagnosed with mesothelioma are entitled to disability compensation, pension and/or medical benefits through the VA. Surviving spouses and dependents may also qualify for compensation from the VA if they have lost a loved one to mesothelioma.

The fact is, you served your country honorably. I'll help you get the benefits you've earned.



Call me right now: 1-844-VET-MESO

(1-844-838-6376)

(Ask for Commander Jewett)

Meet CARL JEWETT, LCDR, U.S. NAVY, RETIRED



Carl Jewett is a retired Naval Officer (LCDR) and the Executive Director of the Veterans Assistance Network. He is a VA Accredited Claims Agent fully certified by the VA to assist veterans in filing for VA benefits.

In 1985, Commander Jewett enlisted in the U.S. Navy. After his initial training in electronics, he received training in nuclear power operations in Orlando, FL. He then served in the Reactor Controls Division on three nuclear fast-attack submarines. In 1997, he was selected for the Enlisted Commissioning Program and attended the University of Maryland, where he graduated with a bachelor of science degree in mathematics. He was commissioned as an officer in May 1997 and returned to the submarine force, serving in various engineering billets.

Commander Jewett's other duty assignments include: USS Kentucky (SSBN-737B), Nuclear Power School Instructor, Division Officer of the Prospective Nuclear Engineering Officer School, and Executive Officer at the Navy Operational Support Center in St Louis, MO.

Commander Jewett earned his MBA from the University of Florida in 2004. In 2008, he retired from active duty and assumed the Executive Director position at the Veterans Assistance Network. He is married to Teri, his wife of over 27 years, and has three adult children, two sons and a daughter. He and his wife currently reside in Winter Springs, FL.

Specific Areas of Expertise:

- Assisting veterans applying for VA Disability Compensation (VADC)
- Assisting veterans applying for VA Pension
- Assisting veterans in finding a qualified mesothelioma specialist
- Assisting spouses in filing for survivor benefits such as Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) and Survivor Pension
- Assisting veterans and spouses filing for Aid & Attendance and Housebound benefits
- Explaining military burial benefits, headstone requests and military funeral honors
- Assisting veterans applying for VA Healthcare
- Assisting veterans and surviving spouses determine eligibility for compensation through asbestos trust funds

VETERANS & MESOTHELIOMA

Veterans who develop mesothelioma as a result of their service in the military are entitled to benefits and assistance from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Veterans make up the largest group of people diagnosed with mesothelioma because asbestos was so widely used by the military. Most veterans who have been diagnosed with mesothelioma are eligible for disability compensation, pension and/or medical benefits through the VA. Surviving spouses and dependents may also qualify for VA compensation.

Things Vets With Mesothelioma Need to Know:

Financial Benefits



Veterans with mesothelioma and asbestos lung cancer can receive a 100% disability rating from the VA if their condition is deemed service-related. These benefits are separate from VA healthcare and are tax-free.

Help Filing a Claim



Free help is available to veterans filing claims with the VA. Filing claims is a complex process because patients have to present evidence to show that their diagnosis was primarily the result of active-duty service.

Caregivers and Dependents



The VA offers benefits to pay for veteran's caregivers as well as compensation for a patient's dependents.

Expedited Filing Options






There are multiple ways to file an asbestos-related disability compensation claim with the VA. Veterans can elect to have their claim adjudicated under the standard processing rules, or they can elect to file an expedited claim under the "fully-developed claim" rules. Determining which is best for you requires the expert advice and guidance of a VA Accredited Claims Agent. To find out which option is best for you, call 844-VET-MESO or 844-838-6376.

Eligibility Criteria and Process

In order to file a claim with the VA, a veteran must meet specific criteria and submit the appropriate VA forms. In order to be eligible, the veteran must have been diagnosed with mesothelioma by a

doctor, have the medical documentation for that diagnosis, and must not have been dishonorably discharged.

The filing process goes as follows:

-  The veteran files a VA Disability Compensation application including an asbestos exposure summary, along with any medical records that support the diagnosis, such as a pathology report from a biopsy.
-  The VA will order the veteran's service record and military medical record, and review the application forms and other documentation submitted by the veteran.
-  In most cases, the veteran undergoes a physical medical examination at a local VA hospital. However, most cancer patients are not required to undergo this exam, as long as they have submitted all pertinent civilian medical records related to their cancer diagnosis and treatment.
-  The VA then makes a decision regarding compensation after evaluating the veteran's complete record.
-  If approved, the veteran receives back pay based on when the application was submitted and then receives a disability check every first of the month.

The most important part of this process is when the VA determines the level of asbestos exposure during time in the military and during occupations as a civilian. This is required as evidence to establish the relationship between the veteran's asbestos exposure and the development of mesothelioma. A VA Accredited Claims Agent can assist you in writing a detailed exposure summary for free.

VA Benefits & Compensation

The VA takes several factors into account when determining whether your mesothelioma diagnosis is service-related for compensation purposes, and the disability level awarded. The first factor considered is whether the claimed disease was primarily caused by exposure during military service, or from exposure occurring before or after military service.

The VA requires evidence of asbestos exposure during military service, which our veterans claim agents can help to determine.

After the VA determines that a veteran's condition is service-related, the degree of the veteran's disability is calculated. The VA rates a veteran's level of disability on a scale from 0% to 100%, measured in 10% increments. However, mesothelioma and asbestos lung cancers are almost always rated 100% disabling.

Lastly, the VA considers whether the veteran is entitled to additional compensation. Single veterans garner over \$2,900 in compensation a month, but can collect more given their marital and dependent status. Veterans can also receive additional compensation if they are in need of regular Aid & Attendance, or are Housebound.

VA Caregiver Support

The Aid & Attendance benefit is intended to help cover the costs of a caregiver to assist with basic daily needs for veterans who are unable to meet their own needs due to their disability. In some circumstances, the VA will pay additional compensation to a veteran if his spouse is in need of Aid & Attendance. Veterans can also receive a Housebound benefit if their disability makes it impossible for them to leave their premises, or if they are in a nursing home.

Dependency and Indemnity Compensation

Surviving dependents of veterans may also qualify for benefits from the VA. The VA offers Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) to a veteran's dependents when the veteran died from a service-related disability. The veteran's discharge must have been under circumstances that were not dishonorable to be eligible for benefits. This benefit starts at \$1,254 per month, but is higher for spouses with dependent children or who are in need of Aid & Attendance or are Housebound.

VA DISABILITY COMPENSATION FOR VETS

Many veterans with mesothelioma qualify for VA Disability Compensation. These benefits can help offset the costs of treatment after a diagnosis. Here is what you need to know about getting your benefits.

What Are the Eligibility Criteria for Veterans to Receive Benefits from the VA?

Eligibility for most VA benefits is based upon discharge from active military service under other than dishonorable conditions. Active service means service as a member of the following branches:

- Army
- Navy
- Air Force
- Marine Corps
- Coast Guard
- Commissioned Officers of the Public Health Service
- Environmental Science Services Administration
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or its predecessor, the Coast and Geodetic Survey

What Kind of Compensation Are Veterans Entitled to if They Have a “Service-Connected” Disability?

When veterans are diagnosed with a disability that is “service-connected,” the primary VA benefit that they are entitled to is disability compensation. To apply for disability compensation, veterans need to fill out a VA 21-526EZ form (Application for Disability Compensation) and file it with the VA.

Do I Have to Prove I Was Exposed to Asbestos in the Military to Get Approved?

The VA will determine whether your asbestos-related disease is service-related, primarily by looking at your service record and in the answers that you provide to the VA regarding your exposures to asbestos, both in and out of the service.

If the VA believes that it is “at least as likely as not” that your asbestos illness was caused by your military exposure, rather than your civilian occupation, you will be approved. The key to getting approved lies in writing a detailed exposure summary that convinces the VA that the majority of your exposure came from your military service.

What Diseases are Recognized by the VA as Being Caused by Asbestos?

The VA acknowledges that inhalation of asbestos fibers can produce:

- Fibrosis, the most commonly occurring of which is interstitial pulmonary fibrosis
- Asbestosis (asbestos related pulmonary fibrosis)
- Pleural effusions and fibrosis
- Pleural plaques (calcification/thickening of the lining of the lung)
- Mesothelioma cancer of the pleura or peritoneum
- Lung cancers
- Bronchial cancer
- Gastrointestinal cancers
- Larynx cancer
- Pharynx cancer
- Urogenital cancers, except the prostate

NOTE: Generally speaking, a doctor must state in writing that an illness is “at least as likely as not” to have been caused by asbestos. The exceptions are asbestosis, pleural plaque and mesothelioma, which are generally accepted by the VA as ONLY being caused by asbestos.

What Factors Will the VA Consider When Making a Decision on My Asbestos Claim?

When judging a claim for service connection for a disability resulting from exposure to asbestos, the VA will:

- 1 Determine whether or not the veteran’s records demonstrate the veteran was exposed to asbestos during service.
- 2 Ensure that development is accomplished to determine whether or not the veteran was exposed to asbestos either before or after service.
- 3 Determine whether or not a relationship exists between exposure to asbestos and the claimed disease, keeping in mind latency and exposure factors.

What Is a Veterans Service Representative, and What Does He/She Do?

Veteran service representatives are advocates accredited by the VA to assist veterans in filing for VA benefits with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

A veteran service representative can assist a veteran in filling out paperwork, ensuring it is complete and correct before it is filed, and can help track the claim through the system. We highly recommend that veterans not deal directly with the VA, but work through an accredited representative. A good representative is an expert in the claims process and can act as a guide in an otherwise complex ordeal.

What Paperwork do I need to file a Disability Compensation Claim with the VA?

In order to apply for disability compensation, veterans need to provide the VA the following items:

- VA Form 21-526EZ (application for Disability Compensation)
- VA Form 21-686c (dependency form if currently married)
- DD 214 (discharge paperwork). If the veteran no longer has this, we can assist in obtaining a copy from the National Personnel Records Center.
- VA Nexus Statement (for diseases that have multiple causes)
- Exposure summary detailing the veteran's asbestos exposure history
- Copies of ALL pertinent civilian medical records OR a signed medical release allowing the VA to request those records. This form is called a VA Form 21-4142.
- If the veteran is married, a copy of the marriage certificate or license
- If the veteran is divorced or widowed, documentation proving that fact

How Much Will the VA Pay Me in Disability Compensation?

The VA pays disability compensation based on the awarded disability rating. Ratings range from 0% to 100% in 10% increments. For mesothelioma and lung cancer, the VA almost always awards a 100% rating if the veteran is approved. The pay rate for veterans with a 100% rating is currently \$2,906/month for single veterans, and \$3,068/month for married veterans.

For non-malignancies, the VA awards a rating based on the results of the veteran's pulmonary function test, which the VA will administer if the veteran has not already had one performed by a primary care physician or pulmonologist.

In addition to the veteran's disability rating, the VA also considers the veteran's dependent status when determining the amount of disability compensation that will be awarded.

If you want to find out how much you can receive based on your disability rating, contact your VA claims agent by calling 1.844.838.6376.

What Does the VA Do After Receiving My Claim?

After the VA receives the *Application for Disability Compensation*, it sends the veteran a letter explaining what has been received. The veteran will be asked about asbestos exposure during the time of active duty as well as before and after active duty, if the veteran has not already provided a detailed exposure summary with the application.

What Does the VA Do After Obtaining All Necessary Records?

After the VA's rating service representative has secured all the records (or evidence) required by law (including the report of any examinations), he/she reviews the file and makes a decision on the claim according to the law and the particular facts in your case.

In the rating decision, the rating service representative lists the evidence, the decision, and the reasons for it. The VA then sends the decision, along with a cover letter, to the veteran. If benefits are granted, the letter provides the monthly payment amount and the effective date. Payments usually begin soon after the letter is received. Benefits are paid back to the first day of the month after the date that the VA received the original claim.

However, if benefits are not granted or the veteran believes there is an error (or simply disagrees with the disability percentage determination), he/she can file an appeal.

What is Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC), and Who is Eligible?

DIC is a benefit paid to the surviving spouse and/or dependent child of a veteran who died from a service-connected disability. Spouses receive a basic monthly payment of \$1,254 plus an additional payment for dependent children, if the spouse requires Aid & Attendance, or if they are Housebound. For more information, ask your veteran service representative.

Will a Legal Case Against an Asbestos Company Affect My VA Benefits?

For VA disability compensation and DIC, the VA does not consider any money you may be awarded from a lawsuit or from an asbestos company's bankruptcy trust fund.

However, the VA will consider your financial situation when the benefit for which you are applying is based on your income level, such as VA Pension. The VA Disability Compensation amount is not based on income level or assets, therefore, any assets acquired through the legal system have no effect on disability compensation.

ASBESTOS IN THE MILITARY

Asbestos was heavily used in the military because of its insulating and fire retardant properties.

Veterans who worked in construction, as mechanics, boilerman or as pipefitters had a high risk of exposure. Despite representing only 8% of the nation's population, veterans make up 30% of the cases of mesothelioma in the nation.

Why Do So Many Veterans Get Mesothelioma?

Asbestos Widely Used in the Military



Asbestos materials have been widely used in every branch of the military. Exposure to asbestos was extremely common in the military until the late 1970s. While the Navy has the most cases of mesothelioma, veterans of any branch are at risk.

Secondary Exposure Risks



Veterans serving in engine rooms and shipyards weren't the only veterans at risk of exposure. Other personnel (artilleryman, vehicle mechanics, and even military dentists) were often exposed to asbestos in their military jobs. Many others were exposed to secondhand asbestos while serving on, or transporting onboard Navy ships.

All Veterans Have Risk of Asbestos Exposure



Exposure was unavoidable for these men and women who put themselves in harm's way. According to the VA, the latency period for asbestos diseases is 15 - 45+ years. Because of this, a great number of these veterans are only now being diagnosed.



Asbestos in the Navy

No branch of the military has been affected by asbestos exposure more than the Navy. The predominant reason for the inequitable proportion of asbestos exposure in the Navy is related to the countless uses of asbestos on naval vessels, from aircraft carriers to patrol ships. Nearly every ship that was built between the 1920s and 1970s contained high levels of asbestos.

Asbestos Use at an All-Time High

Asbestos use in ships spiked during WWII. Veterans serving from this time until the 1980s faced the highest rates of exposure, with veterans working in the engine room and in shipyards suffering the greatest exposures.

The amount of heat generated in the confined areas in these vessels made asbestos the go-to insulating and fireproofing material of choice. Unfortunately, asbestos materials used in any confined space results in exposure that may eventually cause mesothelioma or other asbestos-related cancers.

Regardless of the type of vessel, asbestos was used in:

- Engine and boiler rooms
- Pipe lagging and pipefittings
- Pump rooms
- Insulation and deck tiles
- Gaskets, valves and pumps
- Fan rooms
- Firewalls and doors
- Wardrooms and berthing spaces
- Galleys and mess decks

This put most Navy veterans at some level of risk to asbestos exposure, especially if they served prior to 1980. Finally, in the late 1970s, the EPA and OSHA began implementing and enforcing safety standards for asbestos. As a result, asbestos was no longer used in most applications, but previous asbestos was still present and was slowly phased out of existing ships.

Naval Occupations at Risk

Shipyard workers and sailors stationed on vessels going through overhaul are at the greatest risk for asbestos exposure in the Navy. This is because of the industrial nature of shipyard work. Everyone, from the commanding officer to the lowest ranking seaman, would have had an increased risk during a shipyard availability period.

Work in shipyards tends to produce a large amount of asbestos dust, which puts everyone at risk regardless of whether they worked with asbestos personally. Similarly, many occupations onboard vessels would naturally have an increased risk.

Common Navy occupations that have higher risks of asbestos exposure are:

- Boiler Technician
- Shipbuilder
- Boatswains Mate
- Pipefitter/Shipfitter
- Electricians Mate
- Aviation Machinist Mate
- Hull Technician/Welder
- Seabees
- Aviation Boatswains Mate
- Machinist Mate
- Damage Controlman
- Fireman
- Steelworkers
- Machinery Repairman
- Engineman
- Gunners Mate



Asbestos in the Army

Army veterans are also at risk of developing mesothelioma. Asbestos materials were used in military barracks because of their fire resistance properties, as well as in vehicle and aircraft parts. Asbestos products started being phased out in the 1980s, but hundreds of military areas were left with asbestos in the cement, ceiling tiles and wall insulations as late as the 1990s and 2000s. Soldiers who held certain occupations as part of their service were at risk because of the use of asbestos materials in their occupations.

Where Soldiers Encounter Asbestos

Asbestos was used in virtually every military application where insulation or fireproofing was required because of its efficiency and low cost. Therefore, asbestos has been used in the Army in most every building and vehicle constructed prior to the 1980s. Soldiers who served in any battles up to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars may have also been exposed to asbestos released into the air from damaged buildings.

Barracks

Army barracks are the most likely place that soldiers may have come into contact with asbestos. Fire resistance was an important part of construction in the military, so barracks across the globe used asbestos in their construction. Construction materials were also some of the most common products that contained asbestos before the 1980s.

Some of the most common areas asbestos was used in Army barracks were:

- Flooring tiles
- Joint compounds
- Siding
- Ceiling tiles
- Electrical wiring conduits
- Insulation
- Drywall
- Roofing material

Army Vehicles

Combat and support vehicles make up a significant amount of asbestos use in the Army. It was used in heating systems, brake pads, clutches and gaskets because of its resistance to heat. Gaskets made with asbestos, for example, expand less when exposed to heat, which prevents costly oil leaks.

Military vehicles that were most likely to contain asbestos are those built prior to the initiation of regulations in the 1970s. Therefore, vehicles used during and prior to the Vietnam War commonly contained asbestos.

These vehicles range from ambulances to tanks. Some of the more historically notable Army vehicles that used asbestos are M4 Sherman tanks used in World War II and Huey helicopters used during Vietnam.



Asbestos in the Air Force

Air Force veterans may have also been exposed to asbestos used in military barracks or their occupation. The most unique use of asbestos in this branch was in aircraft.

Asbestos was used in many military vehicles and aircraft, such as brakes, gaskets, insulation, wire runs and aircraft cargo bays. As such, Air Force mechanics have significant risk of exposure because of their work on these systems.

Where Airmen Encountered Asbestos

Being a relatively new branch of the military means that asbestos exposure wasn't as prevalent in the Air Force. Regardless of the branch's relative youth, Air Force veterans are still at a risk of asbestos exposure because of the common use of asbestos in the military. This toxin was most commonly found in barracks, aircraft and vehicles.

Aircraft

It is now widely known that all military branches combined used over 300 asbestos products in virtually every application possible. Therefore, aircraft used throughout the Cold War contained asbestos, including, but not limited to:

- B-36 Peacemaker
- B-58 Hustler
- SR-71 Blackbird
- B-47 Stratojet
- F-104 Starfighter
- U-2 Spy Planes
- B-52 Stratofortress
- KC-135 Stratotanker

Aircraft mechanics would have been exposed to asbestos used in the aircraft:

- Engine firewalls
- Brakes
- General insulation
- Electrical wiring
- Valves
- Adhesives and epoxies used in repair
- Heating systems
- Gaskets

Any component that posed a threat of catching fire or that created heat was insulated with asbestos. These components posed little risk while in good condition. However, components that needed to be replaced made the likelihood of asbestos fibers being released much greater.



Asbestos in the Marine Corps

Marines had the combined risk of being exposed on naval vessels as well as on land. Exposure could occur occupationally, during transport (ships, aircraft, and other vehicles), and also in their barracks.

A report in 2007 discussed the use of asbestos materials at Parris Island (where most Marines go for boot camp). There were so many old buildings on the base that asbestos became a concern. The report laid out plans for the safe removal of asbestos building materials on the base, but it took until the 21st century to address the last remaining vestiges of asbestos.

A Hazardous Relationship – Navy Ships

Many Marines either transported on navy ships, or were stationed onboard as part of the security detail. Therefore, not only do Marine Corps veterans have a risk of asbestos exposure from vehicles used by the Marine Corps, but they also have the same risks as Navy veterans serving onboard ship.

Tanks and Motor Transport Vehicles

Currently, the tank of choice used by the Marines is the M1 Abrams, which was introduced in 1980. This class of tank was developed after asbestos regulations and poses little danger of exposure. However, the Abrams' predecessor, the M60 Patton, was introduced in 1960s, which meant that asbestos was used for insulation.

Asbestos was so prevalent that gunners used mittens woven with asbestos to protect their hands while handling machine gun barrels and hot artillery shells.

However, these fibers aren't as dangerous as the asbestos insulation packed into heating systems and firewalls in these vehicles. Asbestos used in heating systems was more likely to disintegrate and release fibers into the air.

Amphibious assault vehicles, transport vehicles and all-terrain vehicles also pose a similar threat of asbestos exposure. This is because of heat generated from the engines and guns on board. Mechanics who built and serviced these vehicles faced the highest risk of exposure.

Barracks

It is important to remember that asbestos was used in countless facets of the military. This means Marine Corps barracks were laden with asbestos products before regulations were put in place.

Some barracks may still contain potentially hazardous levels of asbestos, and there have been reports of asbestos contamination at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. However, officials now have a clear set of regulations that must be obeyed if asbestos is suspected, and OSHA guidelines that must be followed to ensure that no one working on or around any asbestos products is allowed to breath the deadly fibers.

Asbestos in barracks was used in typical construction applications, including:

- Flooring tiles
- Drywall
- Roofing material
- Piping
- Ceiling tiles
- Joint compounds
- Insulation

Marines responsible for building these barracks have the highest exposure level because they worked directly with these materials.



Asbestos in the Coast Guard

The Coast Guard doesn't have as many cases of mesothelioma as the Navy, but it's important to keep in mind that this branch is about 1/10 the size of the Navy.

Regardless, those who worked in the shipyards constructing vessels and veterans aboard ships were defenseless against the dangers of asbestos.

The risks of asbestos exposure in the Coast Guard are essentially the same as those of the Navy. This is because of the prevalence of the use of asbestos in shipbuilding.

Ships

The prevalence of asbestos in ships lasted until the federal government began regulating asbestos in the 1970s. An estimated 300 different asbestos products were used in all military branches up to this time, mostly in ships.

The Coast Guard has some of the oldest vessels in the world. Cutters are the largest ships in the Coast Guard and are to the Coast Guard what aircraft carriers are to the Navy.

Cutters are also the only vessel in the Coast Guard with a permanently-assigned crew. This means veterans who served on cutters may have been continuously exposed to asbestos.

Other vessels in the Coast Guard that likely contained asbestos are:

- Life boats
- Response boats
- Utility boats
- Long range interceptors
- Short range interceptors
- Transportable port security boats



At-Risk Jobs in the Military

Although there is a possibility of secondary exposure to asbestos from airborne fibers, many veterans were exposed through direct contact.

Those in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard that worked in repair or manufacturing of ships or other motor vehicles, or worked around boilers are at the highest risk of asbestos exposure.

The jobs that are at the highest risk for exposure are:

- Pipefitting/Shipfitting
- Shipyard work
- Insulation work
- Demolition
- Manufacturing
- Carpentry
- Equipment building
- Welding
- Engine/Boiler rooms

Veterans with mesothelioma can often connect their asbestos exposure with military service. However, those whose mesothelioma is not a service-related condition may still be eligible for benefits.

TREATMENT FOR VETERANS

Finding a specialist is paramount to all other aspects of getting diagnosed with mesothelioma. There are programs and people to guide vets through those programs that help veterans get the best care possible.

The VA is not well known for providing quality health care to veterans. There is a history of treatment at the VA that can cause veterans to wrongly assume it's useless to attempt getting treatment through the VA.

What most veterans don't know is that the VA has two world-class mesothelioma treatments centers that collaborate with two of the best hospitals for mesothelioma treatment—Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston and the UCLA Medical Center in Los Angeles.



VA Boston Healthcare System

The VA Boston Healthcare System is not only one of the best places to get treated for mesothelioma in the VA, it's one of the best in the country. The Boston VA has a full multidisciplinary team of mesothelioma specialists supported by the prestigious mesothelioma program at Brigham and Women's Hospital.

Why Should Veterans Choose the Boston VA?

1

Specialized Care

Most VA hospitals aren't equipped to handle mesothelioma patients. The Boston VA is a notable exception, with treatment and support for mesothelioma patients that rivals most private hospitals.

2

Dr. Avi Lebenthal

Specialist Dr. Abraham "Avi" Lebenthal heads the mesothelioma program at the Boston VA. He offers an opportunity not available to patients at other VA hospitals—treatment from an experienced mesothelioma doctor.

3

Collaboration

The Boston VA benefits from a close proximity to some of the best mesothelioma treatment centers in the country. Doctors collaborate with, and often work at, the nearby Brigham and Women's Hospital and Dana-Farber Cancer Institute.

About Dr. Abraham “Avi” Lebenthal

Unlike most VA healthcare systems, the Boston VA has a fully-equipped mesothelioma program lead by a respected specialist, Dr. Avi Lebenthal. He has worked at several of the best mesothelioma treatment centers in the country, finally settling in at BWH and the Boston VA.

For veterans using the VA healthcare system, finding a mesothelioma specialist can be difficult. Many veterans don't realize that general oncologists and surgeons within the VA have little to no experience in treating mesothelioma. The Boston VA is rare in this regard because of the treatment experience Dr. Lebenthal brings to the table.

Aside from being one of the only mesothelioma specialists in the VA, patients often choose Dr. Lebenthal to treat them because he is:

- Experienced in performing both the lung-sparing pleurectomy with decortication surgery, as well as the Extra Pleural Pneumonectomy (EPP)
- Capable of offering a multimodal treatment approach
- An ex-battalion physician

When Dr. Lebenthal isn't treating patients at the Boston VA, he serves patients at the acclaimed mesothelioma program at Brigham and Women's Hospital (BWH). His experience at BWH has gone a long way to cement his position as one of the best specialists in the country.

Dr. Lebenthal's Experience

Dr. Lebenthal brings the skills and experience he acquired at BWH to the VA Boston Healthcare System. He spent four years at one of the world's best mesothelioma programs learning details of the surgical management of the disease. Thanks to that, veterans can reap the combined benefits of using their VA healthcare benefits and seeing a mesothelioma specialist.

Dr. Lebenthal has also served as a physician in the Israeli Army (1991-95). Though he may not be a veteran of the U.S. Army, he has a deep connection with the veterans he treats. He is highly respected among his patients and is known for being a very compassionate doctor.

Dr. Lebenthal's talent as a mesothelioma specialist is highlighted by being mentored by Dr. David Sugarbaker, who is famous in the mesothelioma community for his skill in treating the disease.

There are very few mesothelioma specialists in the VA system, so patients are likely to make the initial mistake of seeing a general oncologist within the VA. Mesothelioma is such a specialized disease that seeing a mesothelioma specialist is vital to the patient in order to receive the most up-to-date treatments available.

Reasons veterans should seek out care from Dr. Lebenthal in the VA:

- Financial restrictions make the VA a necessity.
- He's the only VA-affiliated mesothelioma specialist on the East Coast.
- Treatment from a leading mesothelioma doctor who is a veteran.

“As an officer, I learned the importance of service, dedication and commitment to a larger cause.” — Dr. Avi Lebenthal

Treatment for mesothelioma can be expensive, but veterans can use the VA system in Boston to offset some of those costs. It is one of the only VA Hospitals with a mesothelioma specialist.

Steering through the VA can be a difficult, stressful process. It can be even more difficult to get treatment from Dr. Lebenthal if you aren't located in Massachusetts. However, there are people available to help you get connected with Dr. Lebenthal through the VA.

Getting Treatment Through the Boston VA

The primary benefit of receiving treatment through the Boston VA, other than the stellar mesothelioma program, is that veterans with mesothelioma pay no more for treatment at the Boston VA Hospital than they do at their local VA Hospital, which for most veterans is free.

The VA has a long-standing policy of providing free treatment to veterans. Veterans already in the VA healthcare system, or veterans who meet the eligibility criteria for enrollment in the VA healthcare system, can receive treatment for their mesothelioma from Dr. Lebenthal at the VA Boston Healthcare System for the same copays they are required to pay at their local VA medical facility.

Veterans not currently in the VA healthcare system must first enroll, which requires information such as:

- Discharge certificate from active duty with an other than dishonorable discharge,
- Service-connected disability rating information or personal financial information, and
- Basic information regarding their number of dependents

Finding and getting care from a specialist in the VA can be frustrating and difficult, but there are people who can help simplify the enrollment process, getting you the treatment you deserve.



West Los Angeles VA Medical Center

The Elmo Zumwalt (EZ) Comprehensive Mesothelioma Center at the West Los Angeles VA Medical Center is one of the only VA hospitals where veterans can receive care from a mesothelioma specialist. It is also one of the best treatment centers in the country, led by

internationally recognized mesothelioma specialist Dr. Robert Cameron.

Why Should Veterans Choose the West LA VA?



Specialized Care

Those receiving treatment for mesothelioma in the VA system don't usually see a mesothelioma specialist. However, the LA VA is fully equipped to treat all aspects of a mesothelioma diagnosis.

2

Dr. Robert Cameron

Not only is Dr. Cameron a mesothelioma specialist, he is one of the best in the world. Veterans can take advantage of receiving treatment from Dr. Cameron who has an exceptional track record of significantly improving patient survival times.

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Accepts All Veterans enrolled in the VA healthcare system

The EZ Comprehensive Mesothelioma Center at the LA VA is designed to accept veterans with mesothelioma from all over the country, not just those in Southern California. Getting treated by a specialist is imperative, and the LA VA makes this possible within the VA healthcare system.

The Elmo Zumwalt (EZ) Comprehensive Mesothelioma Program

The EZ Comprehensive Mesothelioma Program is part of the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System, and is located at the West Los Angeles VA Medical Center. The program was named after Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, who passed away from mesothelioma in 2000. Its goal has been to become the number one destination for veterans with mesothelioma.

Some of the key benefits of receiving treatment from Dr. Cameron include:

- He developed the revolutionary life-extending pleurectomy/decortication surgery.
- He has decades of experience treating mesothelioma.
- He is a leader in research and clinical trials.

Dr. Cameron's Treatment Plan

Before the pleurectomy with decortication was developed and improved by Dr. Cameron, the pleurectomy alone had virtually no curative potential for mesothelioma patients. Now that Dr. Cameron has developed a treatment plan that is extending the lives of patients who have a pleurectomy with decortication, that has all changed.

Patient Experience

Dr. Cameron has treated many mesothelioma patients over his extensive career. The development of the pleurectomy with decortication combined with other treatments has produced amazing results in his patients.

All veterans must be enrolled in the VA healthcare system to receive treatment at the LA VA. To get enrolled, veterans must submit basic information such as:

- Discharge certificate from active duty with an other than dishonorable discharge,
- Service-connected disability rating information or personal financial information, and
- Basic information regarding their number of dependents

Juggling all the forms and going through the process of getting enrolled in the VA healthcare program can be a daunting prospect. However, our Veterans Department can assist you in determining your eligibility, and help you file the appropriate forms to get enrolled.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Ways to Get Help Now

Now that you've educated yourself about mesothelioma, asbestos exposure in the military, treatment options for veterans and available compensation, the next step is to take action.



Call 1.844.838.6376
to speak to LCDR Carl Jewett

