

Senator Leahy Approps Record on Burn Pits for FY18 and FY19

Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act for FY2018 (S.1557)

Senate Report – S.Rpt.115-130 [[link](#)]

Senator Leahy added funding to implement the recommendations of the National Academies of Sciences in order to make the burn pit registry scientifically viable in order to improve treatment and solidify causal links. The VA is still overhauling and combining its multiple registry systems.

Improving Federal Burn Pits Registry.—The Committee provides an additional \$5,000,000 for the purpose of implementing the recommendations included in the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine’s Assessment of the Department of Veterans Affairs Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry for improving the registry. The Department is directed to submit a report to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress no later than 90 days after enactment of this act assessing the cost and timeline of implementation of each of the report’s recommendations.

Senator Leahy supported language related to research, which is funded in a separate section of the VA approps bill from the registry.

Burn Pits Research.—The Committee recommends VA continue conducting medical trials, using available treatments for pulmonary, cardiovascular, and other diseases and conditions related to the exposure to open air burn pits. The Department is directed to provide an update to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress no later than 180 days after enactment of this act on the status and progress of such medical trials. Furthermore, where appropriate, VA is encouraged to work with private and public institutions which have already begun to research the chronic impacts of exposure to burn pits in order to develop treatments for veterans exposed to burn pits.

Consolidated Appropriations Act for FY2018 (P.L. 115-141)

Joint Explanatory Statement [[link](#)]

The JES from the Conference Committee reaffirmed Senator Leahy’s registry addition in the Senate bill. Most items in the House and Senate reports are included under a generic paragraph that says anything not contradicted in the JES should be considered to have been approved by the Conference Committee.

Burn pits.—The agreement provides \$5,000,000 for the purpose of implementing the recommendations included in National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine’s assessment to improve the VA open burn pit registry.

Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act for FY2019 (S. 3024)

Senate Report -- S.Rpt.115-269 [[link](#)]

Senator Leahy added language requiring an assessment of how veterans receive information about the burn pit registry. It also called for improved research and research partnerships.

Veterans Exposed to Open Burn Pits and Airborne Hazards.—The Committee directs the Secretary to provide an assessment of the process by which veterans are informed by both VA and community care providers about the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry and their eligibility for registering. The assessment should include an analysis of the process by which VA or community care providers for veterans who may be suffering the effects of exposure to airborne hazards are connected to the VA experts at the Airborne Hazards Center of Excellence for additional resources and assistance.

The Committee is also concerned about the need for a better understanding of and treatment options for rare cancers disproportionately impacting those who have served in the military. The Committee encourages the Department to support research to evaluate the health status of service members from their time of deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan over many years to determine their incidence of chronic diseases including cancers that tend not to show up for decades. The Committee further encourages the Department to establish a collaboration with the Department of Defense to examine the impact of rare cancers on those who serve and fund research in delivering treatments for rare cancers that take a platform-agnostic approach to developing new therapeutics.

Energy and Water, Legislative Branch, and Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Consolidated Appropriations Act for FY2019 (P.L. 115-244)

Joint Explanatory Statement of the Conference Committee [[link](#)]

Within the JES, the Senator specifically reaffirmed his Senate language and provided an additional \$5 million to improve post-deployment health practices and research for veterans exposed to airborne hazards and open burn pits, emphasizing the importance of the topic by

both the House and the Senate. Most items in the House and Senate reports are included under a generic paragraph that says anything not contradicted in the JES should be considered to have been approved by the Conference Committee.

Burn pits. – The conference agreement provides \$5,000,000 for Veterans Health Administration clinical proposals, developed in conjunction with research, focusing on post-deployment health for veterans exposed to airborne hazards and open burn pits. In addition, the Secretary is directed to provide an assessment of the process for informing veterans through VA and community care providers about the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry and their eligibility for registering.

Senator Leahy was also happy to support the specific inclusion of language in the JES that was not originally in either the House or the Senate bills that funds and changes the name of an existing institution to the Airborne Hazards and Burn Pits Center of Excellence.

Burn Pits Center of Excellence. – The conferees are aware that VA currently runs an Airborne Hazards Center of Excellence (AHCE) at the War Related Illness and Injury Study Center. The AHCE was established in 2013 to provide an objective and comprehensive assessment of veterans' cardiopulmonary function, military and non-military exposures, and health-related symptoms for those with airborne hazard concerns. In addition, the AHCE conducts clinical and translational research and actively develops and delivers new educational content to healthcare providers, veterans and other stakeholders. In order to better prevent, diagnose, mitigate, and treat conditions related to exposure to burn pits, as well as to leverage expertise in airborne hazards, the conferees have provided an additional \$5,000,000 for the Center to develop a concentration in burn pit study and research. Furthermore, to fully recognize the importance of this new mission and incorporate the expansion into the Center's overarching expertise in Airborne Hazards, the Department is directed to rename the Center to the Airborne Hazards and Burn Pits Center of Excellence. To the maximum extent practicable, the Department should collaborate with the Department of Defense, institutions of higher education, and other appropriate public and private entities (including international entities) to carry out responsibilities and activities of this Center of Excellence. Additionally, the conferees direct the Department to report back to the Committees on Appropriations no later than 120 days after enactment of this Act progress made in establishing this enhanced center of excellence.