

Solano Veterans Scene August 2012

Marines affected by tainted water should file VA claim

President Obama recently signed the Honoring America's Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act, which included recognition of a water contamination problem that occurred at Camp Lejeune, N.C., between 1957 and 1987.

During that time, Marines and their families living at the base apparently bathed in and ingested tap water contaminated with harmful chemicals. An undetermined number of former base residents later developed cancer or other ailments, which many blame on the contaminated drinking water.

In 2009, the federal government initiated investigations into the allegations of contaminated water. The contamination appears to have affected the water from two of the eight water treatment plants on the base. The main chemicals involved were volatile organic compounds, such as the dry cleaning solvent perchloroethylene and trichloroethylene, a degreaser; however, more than 70 chemicals have been identified as contaminants at Camp Lejeune.

The Marine Corps has since cleaned up the water supply and safe water is being supplied to Camp Lejeune and its residents.

In 1999, the Marine Corps began notifying former base residents that they might have consumed contaminated water. The notifications were directed by a federal health study examining possible birth defects among children born at the base during the contamination years. At this time, there is insufficient scientific and clinical evidence to establish a presumptive association between service at Camp Lejeune during the period of water contamination and the development of certain diseases.

The Veterans Administration is closely monitoring new research. VA representatives regularly attend the quarterly Community Action Panel meetings hosted by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry.

Veterans may file a claim for disability compensation for health problems they believe are related to exposure to contaminated water at Camp Lejeune. The VA decides these claims on a case-by-case basis as they are not presumptive at this time.

- If you were stationed at Camp Lejeune, were in the military from 1957 through 1987 and you have cancer or any unexplained illness, you should contact the Solano Veterans Service Office and file a claim with the VA.
- If you lived or worked at Camp Lejeune prior to 1987, you may register at <https://clnr.hqj.usmc.mil/clwater/index.aspx> to receive notifications from the Marine Corps regarding Camp Lejeune Historic Drinking Water.

While all the facts are not in on this issue, it is recommended that all veterans who have served at this Marine base during the aforementioned time frame with illnesses that could be tied to this exposure should file a claim for service-connected disability by coming into our office. The families of these veterans who lived on this base during that time should register on the above website and get further information.

Ted Puntillo is director of Veteran Services for Solano County. Reach him at 784-6590 or TEPuntillo@SolanoCounty.com. The Solano County Veteran Services Office, 675 Texas St. in Fairfield, is open from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday.