

Longer Exposure to Burn Pits Leads to Higher Risk of Respiratory Ailments

New study links prolonged exposure to open burn pits to increased breathing and cardiovascular disease

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A study published in April found that prolonged deployments to bases with burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan put veterans at a higher risk for respiratory ailments.

Published by JAMA Network Open in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, the study relied on declassified deployment data from the records of 459,381 veterans currently receiving treatment from the VA to determine the health effects of exposure to burn pits.

Through the study, titled *Deployment to Military Bases With Open Burn Pits and Respiratory and Cardiovascular Disease*, researchers found a correlation between longer deployments to bases with open burn pits and slightly higher risks of asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and hypertension.

The study affirms what many in the veterans community and at VFW have suspected for years. It is why the organization pushed so hard for passage of the PACT Act in 2022. The law improves health care access and funding for veterans exposed to toxic substances during their service.

“I do not think it comes as a complete surprise, especially to anyone who served on bases or in areas where burn pits were used,” VFW National Veterans Service Director Michael Figlioli said. “That is why legislation like the PACT Act is so important to veterans. In addition to the benefits it provides, it has required VA to look at additional causes and effects and to continue to study these prolonged health concerns.”

Conducted by a collection of researchers from different universities, the report states that while the associations were modest in magnitude, several million veterans could be affected by the findings. The study also is the most comprehensive look at long-term health

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outcomes associated with burn pit exposures, given that it considers a much larger number of veterans than past reviews, according to its researchers.

Prior to this recent study, research on the long-term effects of exposure to open burn pits had been limited despite public concern to date, according to the JAMA report. It also stated that while deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq have been associated with a higher risk of respiratory disease, researchers questioned whether exposure to something other than burn pits could account for the ailments.

Like many other veteran service organizations, VFW continues to be at the forefront of advocating efforts to continue studies such as this one to expand the knowledge of health complications a veteran can suffer from burn pit exposure.

“VFW has long advocated not only for proper benefits and health care for those exposed to toxins,” Figlioli said, “but for continued study of the long-term health effects of such exposures.”

This article is featured in the 2024 September issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Ismael Rodriguez Jr.](#), senior writer for VFW magazine.