

This is the eight newsletter in a series of ONCORG Community Conversations. They're focused on relationships between doctors and patients, and the complexity of treating cancer.

May 2026 – Early Edition: How Burn Pits have affected our veterans.



Rodney Thomas is a senior officer working for ONCORG, INC, headquartered in Mt. Laurel, NJ. ONCORG was developed as a comprehensive cancer support service for those seeking a first or second opinion for their cancer.

Mr. Thomas is a military veteran who served 8 years in the USAF. He also spent 11 years in the automotive industry, 10 years in healthcare and 8 years with Apple Inc. supporting customer needs.

So he has a unique insight into what it takes to enhance the customer experience and obtain strong customer feedback, which is essential to a company's reputation. He also understands how to maximize performance from a team by encouraging collaboration.

In anticipation of Memorial Day, ONCORG is dedicating the next two articles to our veterans affected by cancer. This article focuses on Burn Pits.

What are Burn Pits?

Between 2001 to 2021, the U.S. military disposed of waste, including plastics, chemicals and medical materials in open-air burn pits at nearly 300 locations in Afghanistan and Iraq. They used jet fuel as an accelerant. Thousands of military soldiers were exposed to these toxic plumes (contaminated air,) which caused severe chronic respiratory issues and various cancers..

To be specific, the following items were burnt:

- ***Vehicles & Metals*** such as destroyed vehicles and metal cans.
- ***Plastics and electronics*** such as computers, batteries and Styrofoam.
- ***Medical & Human Waste*** such as hazardous waste from hospitals.
- ***Fuel and Chemical Compounds*** using jet fuel (called JP-8) releasing substances like benzene.

Symptoms of Burn Pits:

After exposure to burn pits, veterans reported the following medical conditions:

- Various types of cancers.
- Chronic cough, severe respiratory illnesses, and lung disease.
- Constrictive bronchiolitis.
- Eye, nose, and throat irritation.



Take a look at this photo, and it's no wonder many veterans have suffered from exposure.

Types of Cancers caused by Burn Pits:

The VA recognizes several cancers reported by veterans exposed to toxic burn pits. They include cancer of the brain, respiratory system, kidneys, gastrointestinal, pancreatic and reproductive organs. Other cancers include melanoma, lymphoma and head & neck.

Reproductive cancers included prostate, testicular, breast, ovarian, and uterine reproductive systems.

Ongoing Concerns: It has been documented **Vietnam veterans** exposed to Agent Orange passed birth defects to their off-springs because of the exposure to the dioxins. Birth defects include heart issues, neural tube defects, learning disabilities, immune system disorders, and childhood cancers.

Now, researchers are studying whether burn pits victims have caused intergenerational damage to their off-springs. After all, those veterans were exposed to polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, dioxin, tungsten, and other toxins; somewhat similar to Agent Orange. This is an on-going concern. After all, some veterans reproductive organs were affected. Stay tuned.

As a commander in the American Legion, we have a saying. 'Some gave all, and all gave some.' Eventually some of those 'some,' will give their 'all' because of exposure to Burn Pits.

The PACT Act of 2022 expanded VA benefits for veterans exposed to military burn pits, so it's now well known among the veteran community.

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