



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
VETERANS' AFFAIRS
Chairman Phil Roe, M.D.

H.R. 299, as amended: The Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2017

Agent Orange, an herbicide used during the Vietnam War, has been known to be associated with certain health issues in people who have been exposed to the chemical. According to [The Agent Orange Act of 1991](#), if a veteran served in Vietnam between 1962 and 1975 and has a disease that has been associated with exposure to Agent Orange, they are automatically presumed to have been exposed to it and therefore qualify for disability compensation.

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) interpretation of this law, only veterans who have set foot on the landmass of Vietnam or served in Vietnam's inland waterways, known as "Brown Water" veterans, qualify for the presumption of exposure to Agent Orange. This does not include "Blue Water Navy" veterans, who served on ships off the coast. The Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2017 would extend the presumption of exposure to Agent Orange to veterans who served in the Blue Water Navy.

During the committee markup, the legislation was amended to extend the presumption of herbicide exposure for veterans who served on or near the Korean DMZ between September 1, 1967 and August 31, 1971. As amended, the legislation will now also extend health care, vocational training & rehabilitation and monetary allowance to a child who was born with spina bifida if at least one of the child's parents served in Thailand between January 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975 and the Secretary determined that at least one of the parents had been exposed to a herbicide agent during that period.

The bill also now includes improvements to VA's home loan program. Currently, VA-designated appraisers rely solely on information from approved third parties, who, for example, would use a desktop appraisal, when determining a home's value for a VA home loan. This new method would combine traditional appraisal methods with modern data analytics and market data to expedite and improve VA's appraisal process. The bill also eliminates the current conforming loan limit on the price of a loan that VA can guarantee. This rate is set by Freddie Mac and the amount of the current cap varies depending on the cost of living in a particular area. Any veteran who chooses to their benefit to purchase a home above the current cap would be required to pay a funding fee unless they were rated at the 100% service connected level.