

Thousands of veterans nationwide have been diagnosed with the Hepatitis C virus; also, many more have experienced illnesses caused by exposure to Agent Orange. These two issues will be the focus of an upcoming Town Hall Meeting in Victoria next Saturday.

Four area chapters of the *Vietnam Veterans of America*, those from El Campo, Victoria, Cuero/Yorktown, and Hallettsville, along with the non-profit groups *Everyday Heroes* and *Warrior's Weekend*, will host the event on Saturday, March 18, 2017 at the Victoria College Emerging Technology Complex, located on 7403 Lone Tree Road. The event begins at 10:00 a.m. with the Hepatitis C seminar, followed by a complimentary lunch at noon. The seminar continues at 1:00 p.m. with the Agent Orange Town Hall and should conclude by 4:00 p.m.

Though sponsored by Vietnam Veterans groups, the Town Hall is open to all veterans, in addition to their spouses, adult family members, and anyone who desires knowledge about these issues. Because of the nature of the seminar topics, children will not be allowed.

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Center for Disease Control, most veterans with Hepatitis C were likely infected during the Vietnam War (1964-1975). Nationwide, baby boomers are more than five times likely to have Hepatitis C and should be tested for this virus that can lead to serious liver damage, liver cancer, and death. Hepatitis C causes inflammation of the liver and can be diagnosed with a simple blood test. Seminar presenters from Massachusetts, California, Alabama, and Pennsylvania will give attendees important information about treatments and possible cures for the disease. "What's scary is that you can have the disease for years and not even know it; that's why it's important everyone get tested," VVA Chapter 1069 President and event organizer Leonard Sternadel says. "That's why we're doing this; to make people aware of the disease since it can be cured with early detection."

The afternoon session is devoted to information about the many illnesses associated with exposure to Agent Orange. "There's a misconception out there," says Sternadel. "I've talked to some veterans who say 'I have Agent Orange', and I have to explain to them that no one can have Agent Orange, but you could have an illness caused by exposure to it." Many soldiers who served in Vietnam, Thailand, and Korea were exposed to the chemical herbicide, dubbed Agent Orange because of the orange-colored band painted on the drums used to transport and store the highly toxic chemical.

"The purpose of this Town Hall is to make veterans and their families aware of the illnesses and diseases that could be caused by exposure to Agent Orange," says Sternadel. "If it is proven that the veteran or his/her children have illnesses associated with the veteran's exposure to the herbicide, they should apply for disability benefits." During the presentation, the process of filing a claim will be explained. Attendees will receive a listing of all area County Service Officers, who can assist with filing claims related to Agent Orange exposure.

VVA representatives from Virginia will give the Agent Orange report, followed by a Question/Answer session. "That's the purpose of the Town Hall," says Sternadel, "that every person leaves the event armed with information so they have a better understanding of the illnesses caused by exposure to Agent Orange and how it can affect them as well as their children and grandchildren."

For more information on this event, please call Leonard Sternadel at 979-543-1122 or go to <http://www.vva1069.org/y2017/aotownhall.html>.