

# Desert Storm Oil Field Fire Exposure: Health Effects and VA Claim Support

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During the Gulf War (1990–1991), Iraqi forces ignited hundreds of oil wells, producing massive amounts of smoke, soot, and toxic fumes. U.S. service members were exposed to particulate matter, sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide, benzene, PAHs, and heavy metals.

## Short-Term (Acute) Health Effects

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Respiratory irritation, coughing, shortness of breath, burning lungs, chest tightness, wheezing.

Eye and skin irritation including burning, redness, tearing, and rashes.

Neurological symptoms such as headaches, dizziness, fatigue, and difficulty concentrating.

Gastrointestinal symptoms like nausea and vomiting.

## Long-Term (Chronic) Health Effects

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Chronic respiratory conditions including bronchitis, asthma, COPD, sinusitis, and rhinitis.

Cardiovascular issues such as hypertension and increased heart disease risk.

Neurological effects including memory problems, brain fog, headaches, and sleep disturbances.

Cancer risks including lung cancer and blood cancers due to benzene exposure.

Skin disorders including chronic dermatitis and sensitivity.

## VA Disability Claim Example Narrative

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I was deployed during Operation Desert Storm and exposed to heavy smoke and soot from burning oil fields for extended periods. The air was thick with black smoke and we often operated without respiratory protection. During deployment I experienced coughing, burning lungs, and headaches. Since returning I have developed chronic respiratory problems including persistent coughing, sinus issues, and breathing difficulty. I believe these conditions are directly related to my exposure during service.

## **Stressor Statement Example**

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While deployed in Desert Storm I was constantly exposed to burning oil fields that darkened the sky and made breathing difficult. The environment was overwhelming with thick smoke, chemical odors, and limited visibility. I experienced fear and stress regarding both immediate breathing issues and long-term health concerns. These experiences continue to affect me through anxiety, breathing problems, and recurring memories.