

Subject: Unlocking Environmental Infrastructure Files – A Key to Reducing VAC Backlog

Dear Jim and your contacts,

I am writing to share evidence that could directly impact the Veterans Review and Appeal Board (VRAB) backlog and strengthen claims handled by the Bureau of Pensions Advocates (BPA).

The core issue is that environmental exposure data, essential to proving occupational illness, has been withheld because it is stored under infrastructure files rather than health files. Since the 2012 Canadian Environmental Assessment Act changes (now the Impact Assessment Act), these records have not been accessible to claimants or physicians. Without this evidence, medical opinions are limited to “possible” service connection rather than “probable,” which almost guarantees denial and multiple rounds of appeals.

I have obtained documentation and thousands of page from Gimli Air Force Base (via provincial transparency rules after the property changed hands) and from National Defence regarding Moose Jaw. These records contained no health summaries, illustrating why they were invisible within the Impact Assessment framework. Once this data was introduced, two claims I assisted with were approved by the VRAB. This demonstrates that access to these environmental files is the missing link.

As someone living with Parkinson’s disease and preparing my own claim, I know firsthand that without this data, a primary occupational illness claim will be denied, forcing members into fragmented symptom-based claims. This not only delays justice but also fuels the backlog BPA lawyers are up against.

The solution is straightforward:

1. Secure access to environmental infrastructure files that can establish exposure.
2. Use this data as evidence to support occupational illness claims upfront.
3. Reduce repeat appeals by consolidating cases into single, properly evidenced claims.

I believe BPA is uniquely positioned to pursue these records. Where necessary, there may be avenues, including subpoena under the Impact Assessment Act, to obtain them. Fundamentally, Veterans require this documentation for their Charter right to a fair hearing.

I would welcome the chance to meet with you and share the Gimli and Moose Jaw files, case examples, and a framework for integrating this evidence into claims. This could provide the breakthrough needed to address both the backlog and fairness for Veterans.

With respect and urgency,

Erin Zimmerman

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