

Just the Facts...

***Documentation of Deployment Exposures and the
Periodic Occupational Environmental Monitoring Summary (POEMS)
Information for Preventive Medicine Personnel***

BACKGROUND. In the early to mid 1990's after the initial Gulf War, the health complaints of returning troops were evaluated against assumed types of environmental pollutants to which they may have been exposed while deployed. The evaluations were hampered by gaps in environmental exposure and toxicological data as well as the lack of a systematic approach and guidelines to assess unique military exposure conditions. Since then, the Department of Defense (DOD) has continuously improved policies and resources to collect and evaluate environmental data during deployments. Over the last 10 years, all service components have increasingly supported environmental data collection (air, soil, and water), assessment, and archiving efforts. Service members are also now required to complete pre- (DD Form 2795), post- (DD Form 2796) deployment health assessment (PDHA), and post- (DD Form 2900) deployment health reassessment (PDHRA) questionnaires which provide an individual's documentation of any occupational or environmental exposures that they experienced as well as a description of their health status.

While environmental data collection and archiving have improved, and while individuals are encouraged to report exposure health concerns on their post deployment forms, the availability, adequacy, and consistency of documentation that describes the exposure data and potential health implications has remained a concern. This has been due to a variety of logistical, policy, and scientific gaps. For example, the procedures used to collect, assess, and document exposure data have varied between the Services, primarily due to differing resource constraints and missions. For example, Air Force personnel are generally centrally located at more controlled 'fixed' locations, Navy personnel often have unique shipboard concerns and Army and Marine personnel often operate in more austere and/or changing locations and conditions. In addition, Reserve Component (RC) units will fall under a variety of the other Services' efforts. As a result, there have been varied approaches and types of documents used to report exposures and address individuals' concerns.

CURRENT STATUS. Recent military policy changes are improving the standardization of the procedures and types of documentation that describe potential occupational and environmental (OEH) exposure hazards in deployed settings. While it is the DOD's objective to document an individual's unique exposure profile for their entire service period (e.g., linking a person's exposure data with their location and activities), this is not yet possible given current scientific, technological and logistical limitations. Until this type of documentation can be accomplished, the DOD has been implementing procedures to more uniformly assess and document what we do know about environmental exposures and associated health effects. A primary goal has been to ensure that medical providers have access to the most current and applicable information when addressing post-deployment exposure related health concerns. This has resulted in the recent effort to develop an official site-specific **Periodic Environmental and Occupational Monitoring Summary (POEMS)** for each base camp.¹

What: A **POEMS** is an official DOD technical deployment health document (2 page summary with approximately 10 plus supporting pages) that describes occupational and environmental health (OEH) exposures and associated health implications at a major deployment location (e.g., a forward operating base (FOB)). The POEMS describes the types of OEH hazards (e.g., airborne pollutants, water contaminants, infectious disease, noise, temperature), and provides a characterization of the base camp population's exposures and associated acute and chronic health effects. It provides the rationale for risk estimates of short term and long term medical implications and any recommendations for any medical action/follow up/surveillance. A POEMS is based on an evaluation of all available site-specific OEH data, surveys, and reports from a designated time period that reflect long-term exposure conditions (e.g., a year or longer). While the POEMS is reviewed by COCOM FHP personnel in the field to ensure the most current accuracy, primary data and reports are obtained from the DOD OEHS Data Portal archive maintained by the U.S. Army Public Health Command (USAPHC (Prov)) or the Defense Occupational and Environmental Health Readiness System (DOEHRS) maintained by the Military Health System (MHS). Examples of key documents included in the evaluation include the Occupational and Environmental Health Site Assessment (OEHS), intermittent monitoring or field sample data assessment reports, field water surveys, endemic disease information, and unique incident reports.*

Why (requirement): The POEMS addresses the requirements of military policies (DoDI 6490.03, 6055.05, and JCSM (MCM) 0028-07) ** to ensure that appropriate environmental exposure information is available to troops as well as providers should service personnel have exposure-related concerns (such as documented on PDHA).²⁻⁴

The POEMS provides health care providers and deployed personnel an official summary of information known about OEH exposures that they may have experienced at a specific location. The POEMS is NOT developed for inclusion in the medical records of individual persons. This is because it describes estimates of the overall base camp population's exposures and does not describe any specific person's unique exposures. However, if it appears relevant to an individual's future complaint/health condition, a provider may use information from a POEMS when documenting medical information. Similarly, the POEMS is not a medical disability document since disability is generally not automatically granted based upon environmental surveillance data or assessed risks from that data. Disability entitlements are based on an individual's specific disease or condition as diagnosed by a medical provider and the determination of an established medical review board.

Who (Audience): While POEMS are provided for *Service members* (Active duty, NG, and RC), POEMS are especially provided as a source of information for *their providers* (military, VA, as well as private sector) to review should a service member have deployment-related OEH exposure concerns as reported on their PDHA or PDHRA or otherwise expressed during a medical evaluation.

Responsible Parties and Process: POEMS are the responsibility of the COCOM (or designee) but are often developed with assistance from Service health surveillance centers such as USAPHC (Prov). They are developed using standardized protocols and military risk characterization methods. Before being finalized, POEMS are reviewed by a healthcare provider and must be approved by the requesting COCOM Force Health Protection (FHP) officer.

Access/Availability: Personnel with deployment-related exposure concerns and their health care providers should check for a POEMS when evaluating deployment exposure concerns. POEMS are unclassified, and posted on the password protected Deployment Occupational and Environmental Health Surveillance (DOEHS) Data Portal, located at <https://doehsportal.apgea.army.mil/doehrs-oehs/>. POEMS will be available as they are produced, and currently there are only a limited number available⁷, with more in various stages of production. Other hazard-specific or unique incident information will also be available on the site (e.g., fact sheets describing the sulfur fire incident of 2003⁷ or medical concerns regarding burn pits⁸). Requests for POEMS may be submitted at the "Request USAPHC Services" web link at <https://phc.amedd.army.mil/MSRV/ServiceRequest.aspx> where you can select "POEMS" from the category list. You will be notified via email regarding the status of your request.

References:

¹ The Periodic Occupational and Environmental Monitoring Summary (POEMS)—History, Intent, and Relationship to Individual Exposures and Health Outcomes; Technical Information Paper No. 64-002-0909 (Dec 2009) <http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/infopapers/documents/HellerTIP.pdf>

² Department of Defense (DoD) Instructions 6490.03, Deployment Health, 2006.

³ Department of Defense (DoD) Instruction, 6055.05, Occupational and Environmental Health, 2008.

⁴ Chairman's Memorandum (MCM) 0028-07, *Procedures for Deployment Health Surveillance*, 2007.

⁵ CENTCOM Regulation 220-1: Deployment Health Deployment Health Surveillance and Force Health Protection (Feb 2010).

⁶ Military Deployment Periodic Occupational and Environmental Monitoring Summary; for Sea Port of Debarkation/Embarkation (SPOD/E), Shuaiba Port, Kuwait; 11 June 2009.

⁷ USACHPPM Factsheet 64-007-0707; Health Assessment of Al Mishraq Sulfur Fire Incident Status as of 1 July 2007; http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/documents/FACT/SulfurFireAssessmentFactsheet_USACHPPM_July2007.pdf

⁸ USAPHC (Prov) factsheet Medical Concerns Regarding Use of Burn Pits to Dispose of Solid Waste, April 2010.

* *While these other documents may describe exposures and health risks in some fashion, they do not represent the final overall site assessment of health effects or medical implications as described by the POEMS. Inconsistencies are possible, as these other documents are limited in scope (time, location, and context). Concerns should be staffed through the COCOM FHP officer.*

** *The POEMS satisfies the DoDI 6490.03 requirement to prepare "periodic occupational and environmental monitoring summaries on an SF 600 for each permanent or semi-permanent basing location." This clarification is being made to a future DODI revision. In the interim, use of POEMS to replace the use of SF600s for documentation of this type of information in individual's medical records is specified for CENTCOM in a Feb 2010 CENTCOM Force Health Protection regulation⁵.*

If you have questions regarding this document please contact:

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