

Toxic Exposure Safety Act of 2020

Summary: In response to stories from workers at the Hanford site, Senator Murray is introducing bicameral legislation, co-sponsored by Representative Adam Smith, to ensure nuclear cleanup workers are able to more easily claim benefits when they suffer medical conditions as a result of exposure to toxic substances. In March of 2020, the Seattle Times ran an [investigative story](#), which covered stories of workers whose debilitating conditions could not be immediately linked to exposure to certain toxic substances at the Hanford site.

This legislation is needed to address the specific needs of Hanford workers – and other nuclear cleanup site workers around the country – who are exposed to toxic substances while working. The purpose of the legislation is to expand covered employees and covered illnesses under Part E, Section 3671 of the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program Act of 2000 (EEOICPA) to specifically include employees exposed to toxic substances at cleanup sites.

After interviewing several occupational illness professionals and doctors, it is clear that there have not been substantial clinical or epidemiological studies performed in relation to toxic exposures at DOE sites. As such, there is no way to create an accurate casual correlation for Part E, similar to what has been effectively established for Part B of the program, which involves radiological exposures. This bill would amend Part E of the EEOICPA to establish a presumption of occupational disease exposures, create a research program to determine exposure-disease correlation, and direct the National Academy of Sciences to evaluate scientific evidence regarding chemical exposures.

Description

This bill can be broken down into three major parts:

- The first part establishes a Special Exposure Cohort for a list of diseases that, according to medical experts, should be included with current information on causality to exposure and resulting diseases.
- The second part of the bill initiates a five year funding program that would instruct the Secretary of Health and Human Services to select grantees to conduct epidemiological and health studies programs. Eligible entities include any institution of higher education or the National Academy of Sciences. The program is authorized to award \$3,000,000 for each of the five years.
- The final portion of the bill directs the Secretary of Health and Human Services to enter into an agreement with the National Academy of Sciences to review and summarize scientific and medical evidence concerning the association between exposures to toxic substances found at DOE sites. The National Academy of Sciences will issue reports to include additional diseases if evidence indicates a need for inclusion in the cohort. Additionally, the Academy will make a recommendation to Congress if it believes there is a need for additional studies to resolve areas of continuing scientific uncertainty. The duration of this program is ten years.

Why this legislation is needed and supporting entities

This legislation will ensure the establishment of a special cohort by the best medical and scientific data to support worker claims. This information will dramatically simplify the ability of workers affected by exposures to chemicals to get the financial support they deserve. This is a major reason why the ***Hanford Atomic Metal Trades Council, Building Trades, and Local 598 all support this piece of legislation.***