



The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is making the claims process easier for Veterans whose records were damaged or destroyed in the 1973 fire at the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC).

1973 National Personnel Records Center fire

In July 1973, a massive fire broke out at the [NPRC near St. Louis, Missouri](#), destroying an estimated 16 to 18 million military personnel records. The fire mainly impacted Army Veterans discharged between 1912 and 1960, and Air Force Veterans discharged between 1947 and 1964 with last names starting with Hubbard through Z.

For many of these Veterans, the records that burned may have contained crucial details about their military service and medical treatment—the kind of evidence often needed to support a disability claim decades later.

The problem VA is fixing

Even though it's been over 50 years, the effects of that fire are still being felt today. When a Veteran's records are missing due to the fire, VA seeks alternate sources—things like morning reports, hospital admission cards, and old Surgeon General's Office extracts—to help reconstruct what happened during their service.

To do that, VA typically asks Veterans to fill out two forms: one about their medical treatment (NA Form 13055) and one about their military service history (NA Form 13075). Historically, VA has asked Veterans to fill out these same forms more than once—even when the information was already on file—because it wasn't always easy for different claims processors to see what information had already been submitted. This contributed to delays for Veterans trying to get the benefits they've earned.

What's changing for Veterans

VA began using a more consistent, Veteran-friendly process last month. That process includes:

- One packet, not repeated requests. Veterans will now receive a single, comprehensive packet at the start of the process containing both forms, so they

- only provide this information once. That packet will be saved and reused for all future development on their claim.
- No more duplicate paperwork. If a Veteran has already submitted the required forms, claims processors won't ask again—unless NPRC specifically says it needs new or different information that isn't already on file.
- Better visibility for VA staff. VA is improving how this information is organized and displayed internally, so all fire-related records and forms are easier to find in one place. Greater visibility reduces the chance of Veterans being asked to repeat themselves.

What this means for Veterans

These changes are intended to reduce the burden on Veterans who've already faced an uphill battle proving their service information due to circumstances entirely outside their control. Veterans can expect:

- Fewer repeat requests for the same information
- Clearer expectations about what's needed and when
- Faster, more consistent claims processing

VA already applies a sympathetic evidentiary standard when a Veteran's records are confirmed or reasonably believed to have been lost in the fire. VA can accept credible statements from the Veteran, fellow service members or others with knowledge of the event. This means Veterans are not penalized simply because their official paperwork no longer exists.

What Veterans should do

If you believe your records were affected by the 1973 NPRC fire—including if you were previously denied benefits because your records couldn't be located—please don't wait to file a claim.

1. File or reopen a claim at va.gov.
2. Get help if you need it. Call VA at 1-800-827-1000 or work with an accredited representative.

Veterans whose records were lost in the fire should not assume they're ineligible for benefits, and you don't have to rebuild your records alone. VA is here to help.