

CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCE PLANNING

1. **REASON FOR ISSUE:** This revised directive establishes policy for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to ensure that VA takes necessary actions to identify and mitigate the impacts of climate change and incorporate an adaptation and resilience plan into day-to-day decision-making and long-term planning processes.
2. **SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This revised directive updates:
 - a. The policy section regarding VA's commitment to addressing the impacts of climate change on VA's mission;
 - b. Responsibilities for Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries and Other Key Officials to implement the requirements of this directive;
 - c. Adds a References section; and
 - d. Adds a Definitions section.
3. **RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** Office of the Assistant Secretary for Management (OM), Office of Asset Enterprise Management (OAEM).
4. **RELATED DIRECTIVES/HANDBOOKS:** None.
5. **RESCISSIONS:** VA Directive 0065, Climate Change Adaptation Planning, dated June 29, 2012.

CERTIFIED BY:

**BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS:**

/s/
Guy T. Kiyokawa
Assistant Secretary for
Enterprise Integration

/s/
Jon J. Rychalski
Assistant Secretary for Management
and Chief Financial Officer

DISTRIBUTION: Electronic Only

CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCE PLANNING

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PURPOSE AND SCOPE..... 3
POLICY..... 3
RESPONSIBILITIES..... 3
REFERENCES..... 6
DEFINITIONS..... 7

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE.

- a. The purpose of this directive is to commit VA to assess and respond to the challenges posed by the changing climate. VA recognizes that climate change will impact agency services, operations, programs and assets and has broad national security implications. This policy directive provides guidance to strengthen VA's ability to serve and honor Veterans in accordance with [Executive Order \(EO\) 14057](#), Catalyzing Clean Energy Industries and Jobs Through Federal Sustainability and [EO 14008](#), Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad.
- b. This directive establishes Department policy and responsibilities for Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries and Other Key Officials to evaluate and plan for the impacts of climate change.
- c. This directive applies to all Administrations and Staff Offices.

2. POLICY.

- a. VA's policy for climate change adaptation and resilience planning is to make responding to the impacts of climate change an integral part of the Department's mission.
- b. VA will enhance mission delivery to ensure uninterrupted service to Veterans and their families by evaluating, planning and adapting to climate change impacts. VA's climate change adaptation and resilience planning includes:
 - (1) Analysing existing and emerging climate change scientific data.
 - (2) Annually evaluating the risks that short- and long-term climate threats pose to providing quality health care and related clinical and non-clinical benefits and services.
 - (3) Assessing its organizational capacity to adapt to short- and long-term climate threats and develop responses, where possible.
 - (4) Considering climate change and impacts when conducting mission, workforce and stakeholder risk assessments.
 - (5) Enhancing the climate literacy of its workforce.
 - (6) Supporting climate mitigation efforts that also advance environmental justice.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES.

- a. **Assistant Secretary for Management and Chief Financial Officer** shall:

- (1) Establish the overall policy and guidelines to implement a climate change adaptation strategy within the Department.
- (2) Identify program offices and resources within the agency to support the adaptation planning process.
- (3) Oversee the development and implementation of procedures and processes related to climate change adaptation planning.
- (4) Incorporate climate change adaptation and resilience planning into high-level VA business practices.
- (5) Coordinate adaptation and resilience planning across Administrations and Staff Offices to ensure climate change adaptation issues are addressed in a consistent manner.
- (6) Monitor VA's activities to implement adaptation planning and reporting progress to the Secretary of VA, the Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), the National Climate Task Force, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and other applicable entities, as needed.

b. Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries and Other Key Officials shall:

- (1) Explicitly integrate climate change adaptation and resilience planning considerations into existing decision-making processes and activities. This integration assures VA's mission resilience under any condition regardless of threat or hazard. Climate change adaptation and resilience planning will include the following steps:
 - (a) Conduct annual reviews of climate change vulnerabilities to infrastructure, operations, benefits, services, mission essential functions and the workforce needed to deliver them, while using the latest climate information included or referenced in the most recent National Climate Assessment. Include both short-term and long-term climate threats as part of the review.
 - (b) From the annual reviews, identify and prioritize climate change impacts that require the most rapid mitigation response.
 - (c) Identify existing or new mitigation strategies or programs to address the impacts of highest concern to VA operations and infrastructure. Wherever possible, include mitigation strategies that also advance environmental justice.
 - (d) Implement and monitor mitigation strategies. Results and progress updates shall be provided to OAEM upon request to support agency reporting requirements.

- (2) Actively participate and staff intra-agency task forces and working groups on climate adaptation and resilience planning, as appropriate.
- (3) Meet the timelines for climate change adaptation and resilience planning and actions as specified in VA's most recent climate adaptation plan (CAP).
- (4) Provide policy, guidance and oversight on integrating climate change adaptation planning into existing Administration or Staff Office business practices. At a minimum, these business practices include emergency management, risk management, capital investment and workforce planning.
- (5) Develop, budget for and implement adaptation action plans with objectives that are consistent with VA's CAP and climate policies.
- (6) Provide all appropriate personnel with awareness and access to available training opportunities on climate change adaptation and resilience planning.
- (7) Provide timely responses to OAEM in response to climate adaptation and resilience reporting requirements and information requests. Responses may include progress updates, data and other information as relevant.

c. **Executive Director of Office of Asset Enterprise Management** shall:

- (1) Provide executive-level leadership of intra-agency climate adaptation task forces and working groups, as appropriate.
- (2) Assist with collection of existing and emerging scientific data, including the probabilities that climate change impacts will occur as envisioned by the scientific community and supported by CEQ. Provide subject matter expertise and data to assist Administrations and Staff Offices.
- (3) Oversee the climate adaptation management activities described in VA's latest climate adaptation plan.
- (4) Define VA guidelines for climate change adaptation and resilience planning, review and update this directive and any related guidance, as necessary.
- (5) Update VA's high-level vulnerability assessment as needed to maintain accuracy while using scientific methods to identify sensitivity to climate change impacts and organizational capacity to adapt to short- and long-term climate impacts. Vulnerability assessments are used to inform VA climate adaptation planning and actions and respond to reporting requirements, such as those in EO 14057 and EO 14008.

- (6) Support the advancement of climate literacy within VA's workforce through the development of training materials and direct outreach via internal communication channels. Resources will also be shared on VA's [Climate Adaptation SharePoint Site](#).
- (7) Collaborate with other agencies to facilitate the sharing of best practices in climate adaptation policy and planning.
- (8) Facilitate introductions among technical peers at VA and other organizations to share best practices.
- (9) Review adaptation and resiliency action plans, mitigation strategies and updates provided by the Administrations and Staff Offices. For external reporting requirements, support agency approval at the level determined by CEQ and OMB requirements. Ensure that climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts continue to advance and support VA's environmental justice efforts, where possible.
- (10) Provide the necessary level of oversight, authority, influence and training across the agency's top climate priorities and roles, as outlined in VA's latest climate adaptation plan, to implement management work for climate adaptation actions.
- (11) Coordinate with the CEQ, OMB and other applicable entities, as appropriate, to plan, implement and report on climate related actions.

4. REFERENCES.

- a. Executive Order 14057, Catalyzing Clean Energy Industries and Jobs Through Federal Sustainability, [Executive Order 14057](#).
- b. Executive Order 14008, Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad, [Executive Order 14008](#).
- c. Executive Order 14030, Climate-Related Financial Risk, [Executive Order 14030](#).
- d. Executive Order 13990, Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science To Tackle the Climate Crisis, [Executive Order 13990](#).
- e. VA's 2021 Climate Action Plan at: <https://www.sustainability.gov/pdfs/va-2021-cap.pdf>
- f. VA Climate Adaptation SharePoint Site with resources for climate literacy and reference materials. [VA Climate Adaptation SharePoint](#).
- g. U.S. Global Change Research Program (USGCRP) including the Fourth National Climate Assessment (NCA4) at: <https://www.globalchange.gov/nca4>

- h. U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit with tools, information and subject matter expertise to build climate resilience at: <https://toolkit.climate.gov/>
- i. VA Directive 0320, Comprehensive Emergency Management Program. [Directive 0320 13 Aug 2012.pdf](#)

5. DEFINITIONS.

- a. **Climate change.** The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines climate change as any significant change in the measures of climate lasting for an extended period of time. In other words, climate change includes major changes in temperature, precipitation, or wind patterns, among others, that occur over several decades or longer.
- b. **Climate adaptation.** USGCRP defines climate adaptation as an adjustment in natural or human systems in anticipation of or response to a changing environment in a way that effectively uses beneficial opportunities or reduces negative effects. Adaptation is a deliberate decision(s) and action(s) to adjust to climatic changes that have already occurred or are expected to occur.
- c. **Climate resilience.** USGCRP defines climate resilience as the ability to anticipate, prepare for and adapt to changing conditions and withstand, respond to and recover rapidly from disruptions. Resilience is a trait, capacity, or attribute.
- d. **Climate mitigation.** EPA defines climate mitigation as human intervention to reduce the human impact on the climate system, it includes strategies to reduce greenhouse gas sources and emissions and enhancing greenhouse gas sinks.
- e. **Climate vulnerability.** USGCRP defines climate vulnerability as the degree to which a system is susceptible to, or unable to cope with, adverse effects of climate change, including climate variability and extremes. Vulnerability is a function of the character, magnitude and rate of climate variation to which a system is exposed, its sensitivity and its adaptive capacity.
- f. **Climate literacy.** The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration defines climate literacy as knowledge and understanding about Earth's climate, the impacts of climate change and approaches to adaptation or mitigation.
- g. **Carbon dioxide.** EPA defines carbon dioxide as a naturally occurring gas and also a by-product of burning fossil fuels and biomass, as well as land-use changes and other industrial processes. It is the principal human caused greenhouse gas that affects the Earth's radiative balance. It is the reference gas against which other greenhouse gases are measured.
- h. **Environmental justice.** USGCRP defines environmental justice as the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color,

national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies.

- i. **Greenhouse gas emissions.** USGCRP defines greenhouse gases as those that absorb infrared radiation in the atmosphere. If the atmospheric concentrations of these gases rise, the average temperature of the lower atmosphere will gradually increase, a phenomenon known as the greenhouse effect. Greenhouse gases include, for example, carbon dioxide, water vapor and methane. In this context, emissions refer to the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.
- j. **Mission Essential Functions (MEFs).** The Department of Homeland Security defines essential functions directly related to accomplishing an organization's mission as set forth in statutory or executive charter. Generally, MEFs are unique to each organization.
- k. **Vulnerability assessment.** USGCRP defines vulnerability assessment as an analysis of the degree to which a system is susceptible to or unable to cope with the adverse effects of climate change.