The Camp Lejeune Contaminated Water (CLCW) Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) program was developed by VHA in an effort to but its best foot forward. To utilize highly qualified examiners with significant experience and training in occupational and environmental medicine to provide the best services to Veterans.

All CLCW SMEs are physicians and the majority of them have graduate-level residency training in environmental medicine or occupational medicine. Most of the SMEs work in the compensation and pension departments at various VA medical centers. Potential candidates are identified by the Veterans Integrated Service Network/medical center directors, other SMEs, and credentialing rosters. The Office of Disability and Medical Assessment (DMA), under the Veterans Health Administration, reviews the qualification and experience of an individual clinician through a review of his/her curriculum vitae and evaluation of his/her prior experience. This also includes a review of all credentialing and privileging components which are vital to any clinician in good standing. DMA is responsible for providing executive leadership to VHA’s disability examination programs worldwide, including traditional compensation and pension (C&P) examinations, examinations for Servicemembers, and overseas programs. The ideal candidates are those with extensive experience in occupational and environmental medicine, toxicology, and preventive medicine and a strong background working as an Independent Medical Examiner.

The SMEs initially have a week-long in-person training. The topics covered at our most recent training were: History of Camp Lejeune, Forensic Medicine Overview, Toxicological Consequences of the Major Contaminants, Health Care Law, and Review of the Service Record. This is where they become more familiar with, and discuss, the body of quality literature available to date. This small group training consists of 3-5 senior, experienced CLCW SMEs and 5-8 trainees. The participants observe senior SMEs complete a medical opinion; the trainees then complete multiple case studies on actual cases with oversight from the presenters.

The CLCW claim undergoes a complex process from claim initiation to completion (adjudication). It is important to note that the medical opinion is one piece of evidence used by the Veterans Benefits Administration to adjudicate the disability claim. SMEs evaluate each claim based on the identified condition, the condition’s onset, treatment history, and the current status of the condition. For each case, an exposure assessment is developed for the claimed condition, the total time at Camp Lejeune, the Veteran’s specific type of duty, and any known risk factors. Some of these risk factors can include post-service occupation, genetics, social history, smoking and alcohol consumption history, as well as others. SMEs will review the toxicology literature that provides estimated solvent exposures within various industrial settings as well as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency oral reference dose or other standard toxicology measures. The body of literature is comprised of peer review scientific journals, published research reports and other relevant documents.