

FACT SHEET

DEPLETED URANIUM

During the war, US and British forces shot ammo made from Depleted Uranium (DU), a radioactive and toxic waste that is suspected as a cause of some illnesses affecting veterans of the 1991 Gulf War.

Scientists believe respiratory irritation caused by sand storms, oil fires, and concentrated vehicle fumes during Operation Desert Storm weakened the blood/brain barrier and allowed DU to enter the central nervous system of soldiers in the field resulting in slowly developing neurotoxic responses. Their brains, in effect, were slowly poisoned.

The brain is a 'target organ' for dissolved uranium. Tests on some Desert Storm vets show lowered ability to think and solve problems, as well as lowered motor skills in subjects with above average uranium levels.

During the latest operations in both Afghanistan and Iraq, American and British tanks fired thousands of depleted uranium armor penetrators. American A-10 and AV-8B aircraft shot hundreds of thousands of small caliber depleted uranium rounds.

Many troops in Iraq are being exposed to some level of DU, and the exposure this time may be far more long-term. The longer troops stay in theater if they are in a contaminated area, the more exposure they will have. DU is also toxic to the kidneys, and is known to cause cancer from inhalation. It is reasonable to assume that neither skin exposure nor swallowing particles of DU is wise.

The exposure to DU combined with the exposure to extensive combustion products from oil fires and blowing sand from the desert environment, however, is unique and the extent of exposure to respiratory irritants during this war was probably greater than in previous wars. These exposures for some soldiers may be more intense and more sustained now than they were in 1991.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF D.U. EXPOSURE?

Depleted uranium has two different effects on the body, chemical poisoning and radiation poisoning. Symptoms are similar to those described as Gulf War Syndrome. DU may also cause respiratory problems and is known to elevate the risk of lung cancer and leukemia.

- *Chronic Fatigue*
- *Neurological signs or symptoms*
- *Signs or symptoms involving upper or lower respiratory system*
- *Menstrual disorders*
- *Kidney problems*

WHAT SHOULD ONE DO IF THESE SYMPTOMS APPEAR?

- Report them to a physician and get them on record. If they persist, do not be discouraged by military doctors who seem to brush them off. Return again and again if necessary as long as the symptoms persist.
- Those who are still on active duty should immediately register with DOD by calling 1-800-796-9699. Those who have left active military service should call the Veterans Administration at 1-800-PGW-VETS.
- Increase the frequency of screening for lung cancer and leukemia.

WHAT CAN ONE DO TO LIMIT EXPOSURE TO D.U. AND OTHER CAUSATIVE AGENTS?

Get out of Iraq or Afghanistan. If that is not an option ... Cover the face to prevent inhalation of dust, and keep dust out of food and water. Avoid exhaust fumes and other respiratory irritants. Inform the chain of command when there is a way to reduce exposure to dust and respiratory irritants, and explain to them why.

DU SCREENING

In 1998, the VA DU program started offering uranium screening for all veterans concerned about possible DU exposure, using as exposure questionnaire and mail-in, 24 hours urine collection test (for referral information see www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=1158)

NOTE: Information is from <http://www.vethealth.cio.med.va.gov/DUProgram>

**This factsheet was developed by:
Military Families Speak Out
P.O. Box 4193
Seal Beach, CA. 90740
mfsooc@earthlink.net
562-833-8035**