

Wandsworth Stop-the-War Coalition

Depleted Uranium – Silent Killer

Imagine if they started a nuclear war, and never even told you ...

What Is Depleted Uranium ?

Depleted uranium (DU) is quite simply, uranium, and that benign-sounding prefix of "depleted" is merely intended to dull our appreciation of what that really means.

It is radioactive (with a half life of 4.5 *billion* years) and toxic nuclear waste, which the US and UK have used as ammunition (and in the armour plating of tanks) since the 1991 Gulf War, when over 300 tonnes of uranium were deposited in Iraq. Since then, it has been used in Bosnia, Serbia, Afghanistan and once again Iraq.

Uranium is used for its hardness, penetrative power and pyrophoric properties, and because vast quantities are available virtually free of charge, as a by-product of the nuclear industry. The quantities of uranium used are significant, ranging from 300g in the A10's Gatling bullets (typically amounting to 30-40 kg per burst), to 5-30 kg in tank shells and battlefield missiles, hundreds of kg in cruise missiles, and up to 1,500 kg in some so-called "bunker busters".

Accordingly, it's not surprising that its use has been described as low-level nuclear warfare. It has certainly blurred the distinction between conventional and non-conventional warfare.

The Effects of Depleted Uranium

On impact, DU projectiles ignite and burn at several thousand degrees celsius, producing dense clouds of radioactive, toxic uranium-oxide particles. These microscopic particles travel for miles before settling, and are dispersed again by wind and movement, getting into the water and the food chain. They are small enough to penetrate standard gas masks, and when inhaled, they lodge in the body (typically lungs, kidneys and bone marrow) for years, if not decades – Iraqi and 1991 Gulf vets are still passing DU in their urine. It has been estimated that the radioactive dosage from a single such DU particle lodged in the lungs is equivalent to one chest X-Ray per hour, for life.

US army experts have measured radioactivity levels on the Gulf War battlefields, which exceeded the recommended annual US dosage in 30 minutes.

The results of using DU have been all too predictable, with epidemics of cancer recorded in Iraq, and up to a 20-fold increase in birth deformities. Iraqi doctors were comparing the observed symptoms to Hiroshima even before they were aware that DU had been used, and have projected (*before* Gulf War 2) that 44% of the population around Basra will develop cancer. Gulf War 2 may have deposited another 2,000 tonnes of DU (on top of 300-800 tonnes in 1991). In Yugoslavia, 10% of the 4,000-strong Serb community of Hadzici had already died of cancer by 2001.

DU is also widely blamed for the "mysterious" and under-reported Gulf War Syndrome, and 300,000 of the 700,000 US troops who took part in the 1991 Gulf War have since sought medical treatment, with over 200,000 of those having filed for disability. Over 10,000 British vets are also ill.

Dozens of NATO peacekeepers sent to Kosovo after the 1999 bombing (which included over 50 tonnes of DU) have also died of cancer, as a result of the so-called Balkans Syndrome, and 20% of the 17,000 Belgian troops who served in the Balkans during the 1990s were reporting health problems by 2000.

Back in Britain, the military have been test-firing DU for two decades, at ranges in Dumfries and Cumbria. Communities close to the Dundrennan firing range in Dumfries exhibit the highest rate of childhood leukemia in the UK.

It is vital to highlight the dimensions of the disaster brought about by using Depleted Uranium, demand its abolition from the battlefield, and hold Bush and Blair accountable for this war crime.

Wandsworth Stop-the-War Coalition - www.wandsworth-stopwar.org.uk/du
The National DU campaign is sponsored by *Campaign Against Depleted Uranium* - www.cadu.org.uk