



## **URANIUM MUNITIONS**

***The Public Health Association of Australia notes:***

existing policies on: Public Health and War, Nuclear Weapons, Landmines, and the Resolution at the 35<sup>th</sup> Conference on Small Arms.

***The Public Health Association of Australia recognises that:***

1. War is one of the greatest preventable threats to human health and wellbeing.
2. Depleted Uranium (DU) is the waste product from extracting the most radioactive components from naturally occurring uranium, for instance to use for nuclear power and nuclear explosives. DU contains lower amounts of uranium 234 and uranium 235, and is therefore less radioactive than naturally occurring uranium. DU is very hard and dense, and so it is used to produce non-explosive shells and bullets that can penetrate heavy armour.<sup>i</sup> It is cheap and plentiful.
3. DU was used extensively for armour-piercing munitions used in the wars against Iraq in 1991, Bosnia in 1994-95, Kosovo in 1999, Afghanistan in 2002 and Iraq in 2003. It causes permanent contamination of the environment in those areas where it has been used.<sup>ii</sup>
4. The effects of depleted uranium on military and civilian personnel are controversial. Media reports suggest that there are increased rates of birth defects in Baghdad thought to be related to high use of uranium munitions<sup>iii</sup>. Unfortunately there is little independent information to support this. Military and WHO reports claim there is not much increase in risk except in extraordinary situations<sup>iv v vi vii viii</sup>. In addition, many US Gulf war veterans are disabled by a range of symptoms, called Gulf War Syndrome, for which there is no generally accepted explanation. Epidemiological studies to establish whether DU is responsible for these health effects have not been conducted, despite the gravity of the health effects and the fact that DU continues to be used.
5. The UK Royal Society has reviewed the use of DU and concluded that:
  - exposure to DU on the battlefield may cause a doubling of the usual risk of death from lung cancer
  - the risks of leukemia and other cancers from exposure to DU radioactivity are likely to be very low for all conceivable battlefield situations
  - while the majority of soldiers will not be exposed to levels of DU that are likely to cause heavy metal poisoning, a small number might suffer kidney damage<sup>ix</sup>
  - soil around the impact sites of DU penetrators may be heavily contaminated, and could be harmful if swallowed
  - large numbers of corroding DU penetrators embedded in the ground might pose a long term threat if the uranium leaches into water supplies

- localised areas of DU contamination provide a risk, particularly to young children and areas of visible penetrators and DU contamination should be removed.<sup>x</sup>
- 6. Although Australia does not use DU munitions, it is possible that Australian troops have been exposed to them during warfare and in post-war situations.<sup>xi</sup>
- 7. The possible increased use of the Lancelin firing range north of Perth by US Navy personnel on rotation to Fremantle raises the possibility of DU munitions being used on Australian soil, with attendant risk to the health of the local population.

***The Public Health Association of Australia Board, Executive and relevant SIGs recommend that:***

- 8. The Australian government support in international fora an immediate international moratorium on the use of DU munitions.
- 9. Comprehensive independent long term epidemiological studies on the health and environmental effects of DU in both civilian and military populations.
- 8. A cleanup of all areas where DU has been used.
- 9. The Australian government ensures that no DU munitions are used or stored on Australian soil.
- 10. No Australian troops should join any military coalition in which DU munitions might be used.

**ADOPTED 2004**

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<sup>i</sup> The Royal Society, What is depleted Uranium (DU)? <http://www.royalsoc.ac.uk/page.asp?id=1244>, Accessed Aug 2007

<sup>ii</sup> UN Environmental Program Geneva:unep. 16 January 2001

<sup>iii</sup> James Cogan, *Soaring birth deformities and child cancer rates in Iraq*, 10 May 2005  
<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2005/may2005/iraq-m10.shtml> accessed 24/9/07

<sup>iv</sup> Bernard Rostker **Environmental Exposure Report Depleted Uranium in the Gulf (II)**, Department of Defense, Last Update: December 13, 2000, [http://www.gulflink.osd.mil/du\\_ii/index.htm](http://www.gulflink.osd.mil/du_ii/index.htm) accessed 24/9/07

<sup>v</sup> Prof Otto G Raabe PhD, **CHP A short review of depleted uranium toxicity**, Jane's Defence News, 12 January 2001

[http://www.janes.com/defence/news/jdw/dutoxic010112\\_1\\_n.shtml](http://www.janes.com/defence/news/jdw/dutoxic010112_1_n.shtml) accessed 24/9/07

<sup>vi</sup> **WHO Depleted uranium**, Fact sheet N°257, Revised January 2003

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs257/en/> accessed 24/9/07

<sup>vii</sup> The Royal Society **The health hazards of depleted uranium munitions-Part 1**, 22 May 2001

<http://www.royalsoc.ac.uk/document.asp?id=1431> accessed 24/9/07

<sup>viii</sup> The Royal Society **The health hazards of depleted uranium: part II**, 12 Mar 2002

<http://www.royalsociety.org/document.asp?tip=1&id=1401> accessed 24/9/07

<sup>ix</sup> The Royal Society, **The Threat to soldiers** <http://www.royalsoc.ac.uk/page.asp?id=1247>. Accessed August 2007

<sup>x</sup> The Royal Society, **The Threat to civilians**, <http://www.royalsoc.ac.uk/page.asp?id=1248>, Accessed Aug 2007

<sup>xi</sup> Communications between Minister for Defence and PHAA 2005