

TOXIC, RADIOACTIVE URANIUM WEAPONS: DID YOU KNOW?

A Referenced Fact Sheet from Nukewatch

After NATO's use of "depleted" uranium (DU) weapons in Kosovo in 1999, the Council of Europe's parliamentarians called for a worldwide ban on the manufacture, testing, use and sale of weapons using DU, asserting that NATO's use of DU weapons would have "long term effects on health and quality of life in South-East Europe, affecting future generations." The call went unheeded.

—Larry Johnson, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, August 4, 2003, "War's Unintended Effects: Use of Depleted Uranium Weapons Lingers as Health Concern"

The widespread use of depleted uranium munitions by U.S. and British forces in Iraq could pose serious health and environmental risks to troops and residents, nuclear and medical experts warned yesterday. This contrasts with [the official estimate of] about 340 tons used in the 1991 Gulf War. One DU round fired from an A-10 costs \$21.50.

—AP, June 15, 2003, "Uranium-based Weapons Warning: Experts Cite Kidney and Environmental Damage"; Wall Street Journal, Jan. 30, 2001, "Can Tungsten Breach Fortress Uranium?"

Hundreds of tons of depleted uranium used by Britain and the U.S. in Iraq should be removed to protect the civilian

Food Irradiation Update

Potentially Toxic Chemicals Detected in Irradiated Ground Beef; Consumer Groups Urge FDA Ban

WASHINGTON, D.C. — On Nov. 25, Public Citizen and the Center for Food Safety petitioned the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to ban irradiated ground beef. Included in their petition were the results of recent lab tests conducted at the request of the two groups that detected chemicals linked to cancer promotion and genetic damage in irradiated ground beef sold at a restaurant and three grocery stores. The test findings are contained in the report, *What's in the Beef?*

This marks the first time since the FDA began regulating irradiated foods in 1958 that the agency has been petitioned to ban an irradiated food product. Legalized in 1997, irradiated ground beef is reportedly on sale at more than 5,000 grocery stores and restaurants in the United States. The two groups purchased and tested three types of irradiated ground beef:

* Fresh ground beef irradiated with an electron-beam irradiator by SureBeam Corp. of San Diego. It was purchased at a Safeway store in Washington D.C., and a D'Agostino's store in New York City.

* Frozen ground beef patties irradiated with a gamma-ray irradiator by Food Technology Service of Mulberry, Fla., and sold under the "New Generation" label. It was purchased at a Publix store in Hollywood, Fla.

* Cooked ground beef irradiated with an electron-beam irradiator by SureBeam Corp. of San Diego. It was purchased at a Minneapolis Dairy Queen.

All three types of irradiated ground beef tested positive for 2-alkylcyclobutanones, or 2-ACBs, which are formed when commonly occurring fats are exposed to radiation. These chemicals have never been detected in any non-irradiated foods. In the tests, cooking the irradiated beef in a skillet until it was brown on both sides generally reduced the amount of 2-ACBs but did not eliminate the chemicals. No 2-ACBs were detected in non-irradiated ground beef samples, whether raw or cooked.

Recent experiments funded by the European Union determined that 2-ACBs promotes the growth of colon tumors in rats and causes genetic damage in human cells. In addition to raw and cooked ground beef, 2-ACBs have been detected in other foods that the FDA has legalized for irradiation, including chicken, eggs and mangoes. The report, *What's in the Beef?*, can be viewed at: <www.citizen.org/documents/beefesting.pdf>

—Public Citizen, Nov. 25, 2003

Irradiated Meat: Schools Not Buying It

NEW YORK CITY — According to an article published Oct. 8 in the *New York Times*, a nationwide survey of schools shows little interest in the Department of Agriculture's proposal to sell irradiated ground beef for school lunch programs. In telephone interviews with school officials in 56 districts, 34 of the officials said they had no plans to buy the beef, four said they definitely would not use it, five did not comment and 13 said they had not decided. None had plans to purchase the beef.

When school officials were asked why they were choosing not to purchase the beef, some said they did not see contamination as a problem, others cited the need for more information about the health effects of irradiated meat, and others were deterred by the increased cost of the beef.

There are other indications that the Department of Agriculture's plan has been a flop. In Los Angeles, the second largest school district in the nation, the school board passed a resolution that banned irradiated beef from all district schools for five years. A Minnesota school participating in the "educational" pilot program, designed by the Department of Agriculture, decided to drop out of the program, saying the material was more promotional than educational. Dr. Robert Ervin, the superintendent of the Bangor, Maine, school district, questioned the philosophy behind meat irradiation: "If the meat gets to the point where it must be irradiated, then I want to be questioning why we're giving the meat to them at all."

—New York Times, Oct. 8, 2003

population, the Royal Society said yesterday, contradicting Pentagon claims it was not necessary. The Society's statement fuels the controversy over the use of depleted uranium, which is an effective tank destroyer and bunker buster but is believed by many scientists to cause cancers and other severe illnesses.

—Paul Brown, The Guardian, London, April 17, 2003, "Scientists Urge Shell Clear-Up to Protect Civilians, Royal Society Spells Out Dangers of Depleted Uranium"

The April issue of *New Scientist* magazine reported that Alexandra Miller, a radiobiologist with the Armed Forces Radiobiology Research Institute in Bethesda, Maryland, discovered the first direct evidence that radiation from DU can damage chromosomes. "The chromosomes break, and the fragments reform in a way that results in abnormal joins. Both the breaks and the joins are commonly found in tumor cells," the article says. The implication is that it could cause cancer.

—Larry Johnson, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, August 4, 2003, "War's Unintended Effects: Use of Depleted Uranium Weapons Lingers as Health Concern"

In the first Gulf War, U.S. forces used [an officially estimated] 320 tons of DU, 80 percent of it fired by A-10 aircraft. Some estimates suggest 1000 tons or more of DU was used in the current war. But the Pentagon disclosed Wednesday [May 14, 2003], that about 75 tons of A-10 DU bullets were used by the A-10s alone, not including tank munitions, etc. ...

—Scott Peterson, Christian Science Monitor, May 15, 2003, "Less DU in This War?"

The Pentagon and the UN estimate that U.S. and British forces used 1,100 to 2,200 tons of armor-piercing shells made of depleted uranium during attacks in Iraq in March and April — far more than the [officially] estimated 375 tons used in the 1991 Gulf War.

—Larry Johnson, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, August 4, 2003, "War's Unintended Effects: Use of Depleted Uranium Weapons Lingers as Health Concern"

According to an August 2002 report by the UN subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, laws which are breached by the use of DU shells include: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the Charter of the United Nations; the Genocide Convention; the Convention Against Torture; the four Geneva Conventions of 1949; the Conventional Weapons Convention of 1980; and the Hague Conventions of 1899 and

1907, which expressly forbid employing "poison or poisoned weapons" and "arms, projectiles or materials calculated to cause unnecessary suffering." All of these laws are designed to spare civilians from unwarranted suffering in armed conflicts.

—Neil Mackay, Sunday Herald of Scotland, March 30, 2003, "U.S. Forces' Use of Depleted Uranium Weapons is 'Illegal'"

In August 2002, the U.N. Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights authorized a study of the dangers of DU, [the use of] which the panel had already labeled a [violation of humanitarian law].

—Robert Collier, San Francisco Chronicle, January 13, 2003, "Iraq Links Cancers to Uranium Weapons: U.S. Likely to Use Arms Again in War"

A United Nations subcommission [on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights] has asked for a ban on DU weapons, claiming they're inhumane.

—Ray Rivera and Craig Welch, The Seattle Times, January 9, 2003, "Navy's Ammo has Environmentalists, Others Up in Arms"

Depleted uranium ... is dirt cheap. Tons of it, over 500 million pounds the last time anyone counted, is lying around in various states of nuclear "decay" at government repositories throughout the [U.S.]. In an attempt to reduce this over-abundance of nuclear waste, the Defense Department provides depleted uranium to munitions makers such as Alliant Techsystems [in Minneapolis, Minnesota,] — the largest maker of depleted uranium projectiles in the world — at no cost and buys it back as completed weapons. [Emphasis added]

—Elliot Borin, Wired magazine, March 10, 2003, "U.S. Stocking Uranium-Rich Bombs?"

Pressure mounted on NATO this week for the use of depleted uranium munitions to be investigated. German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder called for a halt in the [NATO's] use of uranium weapons and a full inquiry into possible effects on soldiers in the Balkans. "I have a healthy skepticism about the use of munitions that could lead to dangers for our own soldiers," he said. He also said he did not believe it was right for the U.S. to continue to use such munitions.

—Alexander Nicoll, Ralph Atkins and Frances Williams, Business Day, January 10, 2001, "NATO Pressed to Open Uranium Arms Probe: Germany Calls for Inquiry and for Use of Weapons to be Halted"; Marlise Simons, New York Times, January 11, 2001, "Uranium-Tipped Arms Ban Rejected by NATO Majority"; Ray Moseley, Chicago Tribune, January 9, 2001, "Europeans Fear Balkans Ammo Still Lethal"

Editorial

War, the Halftime Show

Passing through my sister's living room in November, I saw a bit of football on TV. Just as I looked at the screen, the network camera turned skyward and panned the fly-over of two military jet fighter bombers. There was a roar from the jets and from the, shall I say, fired-up crowd. What was the crowd cheering for?

Friends tell me that such displays — warplanes flying low over sports stadiums — are commonplace. "Everybody's doing it. It's like you're not really somebody unless the jet fighters fly over your game," one said.

These hugely expensive demonstrations constitute state propaganda and manipulation, a deliberate attempt to trivialize the function and consequences of war. Such glorification of military machinery, if employed by another country, would be called "militarism," or if done by an official enemy like one of Mr. Bush's "evil" states, would be denounced as "worrisome."

Seeing the jets being used as entertainment, my first thought was of Eleanor Otterness, the long-time Minnesota peace and human rights activist, who spoke to a college history class in 1978. Otterness said, "Empires in decline are characterized by at least two things: 1) sending mercenary armies all over the world; and 2) building sports stadiums at home."

What are the so-called "coalition forces" of today's U.S. takeover of Iraq if not mercenary armies bought and paid for by bribes? And it's no exaggeration to say that much of the U.S. public knows more about sports statistics and schedules than about their own government's war on Iraq, much less the war system that produces and profits from it.

My second thought was of the token pacifist in Rodney Dangerfield's comedy "Back to School," who calls football "a crypto-fascist metaphor for nuclear war." Indeed, while the "circus" jets were screaming over football stadiums around the U.S., similar planes were dropping 500-pound bombs on the Iraqi town of Fallujah west of Baghdad. "This is war," said Maj. Gen. Charles Swannack, Jr., months after Bush said the war was over. "We're going to use a sledgehammer to crush a walnut," he said. Indeed, the *Los Angeles Times* reported in late November that the Pentagon, "has begun using massive and costly 'smart bombs,' ground-strafting AC-130 gunships and heavily armed Apache helicopters for the first time since the march to Baghdad."

Did it occur to a few of our football fans that U.S. jets were then bombing football (soccer, that is) fans in Iraq and Afghanistan — people completely unconnected to and in many cases unaware of the war? When do we ever hear of the number of Iraqis being killed? In October, an Iraqi doctor told

me that about 40 civilians were being killed every day, which if true would amount to 9,600 since the invasion began. She wasn't exaggerating. By Nov. 23, Iraq Body Count, the independent database of media-reported deaths, estimated that between 7,898 and 9,729 civilians had been killed by Bush's war. (www.iraqbodycount.net)

But never mind the killing of innocents, the use of indiscriminate bombs, the shoot-to-kill orders. The Pentagon wants sports fans — the term is an abbreviation of *fanatic* — not to think of broken bones, smashed houses and destroyed lives, or the terrifying daily threat of it all. Instead, we are encouraged to cheer the jet bomber's raw power for its own sake. Meanwhile, an Iraqi homemaker living near U.S. targets told the Associated Press, "Me and my children spent the night shaking. We do not want to be their targets."

"The fanatics of terror showed themselves to be callous, brutal murderers of the innocent," Prime Minister Tony Blair said while Mr. Bush was in London. Blair was not speaking of U.S. pilots dropping bombs "on vacant buildings in Baghdad," or of the 2,000-lb. bombs hitting targets in populated areas, but of Iraqi insurgents. Blair was talking about the anti-occupation attacks that Mr. Bush himself has egged on with his juvenile taunt, "Bring 'em on!" — not the callous and brutal U.S. practice of destroying the houses of "relatives of suspected guerrillas."

Relatives of suspects? While the Generals claim to be acting legally, the Geneva Conventions forbid destruction of civilian objects. Is this what liberation and democracy will mean to ordinary Iraqis — the presumption of guilt, mass arrests and the imposition of the severest penalties based on mere association with unconfirmed suspects with no due process or right to appeal?

Since there is no denying the growth and breadth of the insurgency against the occupation and the steadfast international disapproval of the U.S. war, public perception is deathly important to the U.S. perception managers.

Propaganda and psychological warfare are probably taken more seriously by the administration than the bombing and killing of Iraqis. This is always true when the purpose and intention of military adventures is called into question. Even Robert Dillon of the conservative Heritage Foundation said of November's intensified warfare, "They might be dropping those bombs purely for public perception reasons."

Military fly-overs of sports stadiums and the television networks' broadcast of them can also serve a devilishly political purpose. The portrayal of a complete and even festive disconnection between jet bombers and the mass destruction they cause might assure enough people enough of the time that war isn't terrorism — and doesn't foster it.

—John LaForge