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Army to Survey Hawai`i for Radioactive Contamination Public Questions Accuracy and Transparency of Army's Tests

HONOLULU, Hawai`i -- The U.S. Army has finally heeded public concerns about depleted uranium contamination and announced Friday that it will conduct surveys for the radioactive material at several ranges throughout the Hawaiian Islands. The plan has not been released to the public for review.

“Without seeing the survey plan, or the records of munitions used and unearthed in the field, it is hard to say whether this is a serious measure to protect public health, or just for show,” said Kyle Kajihiro of the American Friends Service Committee. “The Army’s history of secrecy and lying to the public does not allow us to blindly trust what they say.”

“We are glad the Army is finally acknowledging the severity of the DU discovery two years ago,” said Marti Townsend with KAHEA: The Hawaiian-Environmental Alliance. “But we call for independent verification and public oversight to ensure the tests accurately assess the threat to the public’s health. Our health is too important to risk on false negatives and substandard levels of protection.”

In January 2006, the public learned that the U.S. Army had discovered depleted uranium at Schofield Barracks in the fall of 2005. The U.S. Army failed to advise the public of the discovery, despite past repeated assurances that depleted uranium had never been used in the Hawaiian Islands.

“It is outrageous that the Army was training with a nuclear weapons system such as the Davey Crockett in Hawai`i,” said Kajihiro. “When we exposed the fact that DU was found in Schofield more than a year ago, we requested information about the source of the contamination and records of munitions unearthed in Schofield. The Army has refused to release this information. What else are they hiding from us?”

The Army has known about the DU contamination at Schofield Barracks since at least September 2005, but has failed to take the necessary precautions to protect the public’s health from exposure.

Of particular concern is the health of the workers that have been contracted for the Stryker Brigade expansion at Schofield Barracks, some of whom were sent to monitor the detonation of unexploded ordnance that included munitions labeled as “Davey Crockett” rounds. The Army neither warned nor

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provided protective gear for these civilian workers, who were nearby when unexploded ordnance was detonated in the open air. Detonation can create DU particles small enough to be inhaled, which is the most dangerous form of ingestion. Even more distressing is the fact that DU dust is easily carried away on clothing and other surfaces.

“The Army’s failure to adequately warn and protect the workers means these workers may be unknowingly taking DU contamination home with them to their families,” said Kajihiro.

There are other known incidences of DU in Hawai‘i. According to a Navy mishap report, on May 4, 1994, there was an “inadvertent firing” of two live 20-milimeter DU rounds from the USS Lake Erie into the forested hills above ‘Aiea. The Naval Radioactive Materials Permit No. 13-00164-L1NP also names Naval Magazine Lualualei as an ammunition storage site where DU munitions are stored in Hawai‘i.

Depleted uranium is a byproduct of the uranium enrichment process. It is a highly toxic, radioactive heavy metal. The Army uses this material in anti-tank weapons systems. It is also used in dirty bombs because its radioactive characteristics cause health problems similar to nuclear fallout.

Depleted uranium is suspected to cause many dangerous diseases and illnesses, including Gulf War Syndrome, several types of cancers, and debilitating birth defects. It is incumbent on the U.S. military to halt all expansion efforts in the Hawaiian Islands while the extent of this threat to the public’s health is fully assessed and remedied.

Depleted uranium is one of many military contaminants that threaten public health in Hawai‘i. The Department of Defense has listed more than 800 military contamination sites in Hawai‘i. DMZ-Hawai‘i / Aloha ‘Aina and other groups have called for a halt to any further military expansion in Hawai‘i such as the Stryker Brigade, which will increase the amount of munitions and contamination releases by 25%.

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