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DEPLETED URANIUM CONTAMINATION MAY BE MORE WIDESPREAD THAN ARMY REPORTED

As the State House Finance Committee convenes to hear a bill calling for testing for depleted uranium contamination near military bases, community groups released new information indicating that the amount of contamination from depleted uranium may be more extensive than the Army previously disclosed.

Members of DMZ-Hawai'i / Aloha 'Aina and other concerned community members will be available to speak with the media about recent developments at 1:15 pm on Saturday, February 24, 2007 in front of Conference Room 308, where the Finance Committee hearing will be held.

In January 2006, DMZ-Hawai'i/Aloha 'Aina revealed Army correspondence confirming that the Army had found depleted uranium and chemical weapons contamination in the Wahiawa area. Having repeatedly denied using depleted uranium in Hawai'i, the Army was forced to admit to the discovery of depleted uranium fragments from an old weapon system, but it failed to disclose the name of the weapon system or the full extent of contamination.

DMZ-Hawai'i / Aloha 'Aina has now learned that the depleted uranium probably came from the spotting round from a nuclear weapon nicknamed the "Nuclear Davey Crockett" and that the Army may have improperly detonated in the open air live spotting rounds containing depleted uranium. Spotting rounds for the Davey Crockett contained depleted uranium and were used to calibrate the trajectory of the projectile.

Concerned about the threats to the public's health, local legislators are considering a bill to test the environment for depleted uranium contamination. The bill before the House Finance Committee (HB 1452) calls for soil sampling within 500 meters of the border of all military installations in Hawai'i. A similar bill currently before the Senate Committee on Ways and Means (SB 1708) would provide testing for National Guard troops returning from deployment and an environmental impact statement on the methods for storing and disposing of depleted uranium.

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Kamoa Quitevis, a cultural monitor who worked on the Schofield site said that he has seen more depleted uranium fragments from the Davey Crockett than the Army reported to the public. He photographed an unexploded Davey Crockett round found in the Schofield impact area that was detonated with other unexploded ordnance.

“They blew up the Davey Crockett in the open air. We were sent in to inspect the detonation site soon after the explosion without protective gear. So far, the Army has not tested me or my family,” said Quitevis.

Quitevis reported that as recently as October 2006, the Army detected depleted uranium on the range using Geiger meters in areas where workers were removing unexploded ordnance and surveying for cultural sites. The workers were not informed of any hazard nor provided with protective equipment.

Kyle Kajihiro of DMZ-Hawai‘i/Aloha Aina and the American Friends Service Committee said “It has been more than a year since we requested information from the Army about the munitions found in the Schofield area, but the Army has refused to provide answers. This information is crucial for workers as well as residents of the community who may have been exposed.”

Depleted uranium is a radioactive heavy metal that is used by the military as a weapon. Some believe that it may be a factor in Gulf War Syndrome in veterans, as well as many other disturbing health consequences like birth defects.

“Unfortunately, depleted uranium is just one of many toxic chemicals in our environment that the public is concerned about,” said Marti Townsend of KAHEA: The Hawaiian-Environmental Alliance. “Contamination at Schofield Barracks is particularly distressing because it flows into the largest and most heavily used groundwater aquifers on O‘ahu. The military’s use of lead, TCE, perchlorate, as well as depleted uranium, is a threat to the safety of O‘ahu’s main drinking water supply.”

DMZ-Hawai‘i / Aloha ‘Aina reiterates its call for no more military expansion and the clean up of military contaminated sites.

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