

Depleted Uranium

What Is Depleted Uranium?

Depleted Uranium (DU) is a byproduct of the uranium enrichment process that makes nuclear fuel. DU has approximately 60 percent of the radioactivity and the same chemical toxicity as natural uranium, which is present in small amounts in our environment and to which we are all exposed through our food and water. In the early 1960s, the U.S. began testing DU for projectile use because of its ability to penetrate armor made with less dense metals.

When Is Depleted Uranium Hazardous?

DU is a chemical and radiation health hazard primarily if internalized, such as through embedded fragments, contaminated wounds, and inhalation or ingestion. When a projectile made with DU penetrates a vehicle, small pieces of DU are created that can scatter and become embedded in muscle and soft tissue. In addition to DU wounds, service members exposed to DU in struck vehicles may inhale or swallow small airborne DU particles. Simply riding in a vehicle with DU weapons or DU shielding will not expose a service member to significant amounts of DU or external radiation.

See more at: http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/depleted_uranium/index.asp#sthash.h1HaWWRa.dpuf

What are the Health Effects of Depleted Uranium?

The potential for health effects from internal exposure is related to the amount of DU that enters a person's body. If DU enters the body, it may remain in the body. Studies show high doses may especially affect the kidneys. So far, no health problems associated with DU exposure have been found in veterans exposed to DU. Researchers and clinicians continue to monitor the health of these veterans. To learn more about results of medical and scientific research and other DU topics, go to the Department of Defense Depleted Uranium Library.

Who May Be At Risk?

Veterans who served in active duty service in any of the conflicts listed below to qualify for the DU Follow-Up Program:

- 1990-1991 Gulf War
- Bosnia
- Operation Enduring Freedom
- Operation Iraqi Freedom
- Operation New Dawn

Depleted Uranium Follow-Up Program

A VA Depleted Uranium Follow-up Program has been established at the Baltimore VA Medical Center to study health effects of DU exposure and to provide recommendations for treatment, including surgical removal of embedded fragments. The program for veterans exposed to DU from embedded fragments involves detailed physical exams and clinical tests of organ system function.

In addition, a screening program for other veterans concerned about DU exposure during combat involves an exposure questionnaire and a mail-in, 24-hour urine test for DU.

Veterans who believe they were exposed to harmful Depleted Uranium conditions, such as being in a vehicle when it was struck by friendly fire or in a vehicle or building after it had been struck by friendly fire, and would like to be screened for DU exposure, contact the nearest VA Medical Center. They may be eligible to be awarded a service-connected disability. For information on the DU Follow-Up Program.