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VIDEO: US Veterans and Depleted Uranium (DU)

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Theme: Militarization and WMD
In-depth Report: Depleted Uranium

The deadly impacts of Depleted Uranium ammunition (DU) used in Iraq acknoweldged by the Pentagon:

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Transcript of Video

Transcript of the CNN TV-Program "Good Morning, America"

"Inhaling Depleted Uranium made him sick"

Part I

Here's one highly effective and also very highly controversial weapon in the U.S. military arsenal. It's called depleted uranium or DU and some veterans are now suing the Army over what they say are health risks from their exposure to DU. Greg Hunter joins us this morning. He's got a special American Morning investigation. Good morning, Greg.

Greg Hunter, CNN Correspondent: Good morning. Depleted uranium, the issue is exactly what U.S. soldiers may or may not know about its potential health impact.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

Hunter (voice-over): It's the U.S. military's most potent anti-tank weapon. Depleted uranium or DU, on impact burns through armor like a hot knife through butter, creating a plume of radioactive dust. Specialist Gerard Matthew cleaned up vehicles hit by DU during his five months in Iraq in 2003. He says breathing in depleted uranium dust made him sick.

Gerard Matthew, Iraq War Veteran: I came back with chronic migraines, swelling in my face and vision problems.

Hunter: Matthew also says his 2 1/2-year-old daughter's birth defect is a direct result of his DU exposure. He and seven other vets are suing the army over depleted uranium. The U.S. army insists its own testing of Iraq veterans shows no direct link between DU and illness or birth defects in humans.

Col. Mark Melanson, Walter Reed Army Medical Center: The radioactivity from depleted uranium is localized within the site of impact and it's not posed a significant immediate health hazard.

Hunter: The World Health Organization and the Institute of Medicine seem to agree. They found no direct evidence linking DU to birth defects or cancer in humans, but a Pentagon

sponsored study by the armed forces radio biology institute showed the combined effect of DU's heavy metal and its radioactivity can damage DNA and may cause genetic defects and tumors in animals and human stem cells. The military has warned about the potential dangers of breathing in DU-contaminated dust, like in this instructional video produced for the U.S. military in 1995.

Unidentified Male: Heavy metal poisoning may occur, which can cause damage to internal organs and tissue.

Hunter: That same video talks about radioactive particles that could be trapped in the lungs and possible water and soil contamination. The army's leading expert on DU hazard awareness training concedes these are all possibilities, but U.S. troops going over to Iraq never saw this tape.

Melanson: There were lots of errors and conflicting messages in that training video, so it was not finalized and distributed to the troops.

Hunter: Instead, the army's official training video, used since 2000, describes DU contamination this way.

Unidentified Male: These emissions are well below U.S. safety standards and do not pose a hazard to soldiers working with or around DU munitions.

Hunter: The new video does tell soldiers to wear gloves and masks, especially inside DU-damaged vehicles or within 50 meters of fires that may involve DU. The problem is some soldiers like Gerard Matthew, say they never saw it. Dr. Asaf Durakovic studied the effects of DU on veterans of the first Gulf war for the U.S. military. He was alarmed by his findings. Now a private researcher, he also tested recent Gulf war vets, including Gerard Matthew who Durakovic says has dangerously high levels of DU in his body.

Dr. Asaf Durakovic, Uranium Medical Research Center: Inhalation of uranium dust is harmful.

Hunter: Even in small amounts?

Durakovic: Even in the amount of one atom.

Hunter: Durakovic says those small atoms emit radiation for the rest of a soldier's life. Can't that hurt a soldier in the long run?

Dr. Michael Kirkpatrick, DoD Health Affairs: It would come then to the dose, the total dose in their body and those particles are very, very small.

Hunter: Matthew's wife wishes her husband had known more about the potential dangers of DU.

Unidentified Female: He wasn't told it's out there. He exposed my daughter to this, but it's not his fault. He was just trying to help the country.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

Hunter: Defense Department officials say the U.S. military used 320 tons of depleted uranium during the first Gulf war, but they were unable to tell us how much DU they have

used in the current Gulf war, despite our repeated request for that information Published reports suggest the military has used between 1,100 and 2,200 tons. That's up to six times the amount of DU in Iraqi freedom than in the first Gulf war.

S. O'Brien: So they're testing all these soldiers to see if they're emitting radioactivity?

Hunter: The government is. The Pentagon is, but there are some states out there passing laws to test their own National Guard troops because they say the test the government is using is not sensitive enough. We'll find out about that tomorrow in part two.

S. O'Brien: All right, part two, Greg Hunter, thank you. Miles.
Part II

O'Brien: Well, now to our American Morning special investigation on the fallout, if you will, from the use of depleted uranium in the war zone. It can cut through a foot of enemy armor and leave behind radioactive dust that some say is making vets sick.

American Morning's Greg Hunter joining us now with part two of the series. Good morning, Greg.

Greg Hunter, CNN Correspondent: Good morning, Miles.Depleted uranium, the controversial weapon and the radioactive dust it creates are at the center of a debate that just won't go away.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

Hunter (voice-over): Samarra, Iraq, spring 2003, Iraq, site of a fierce coalition offensive. Soldiers operating, sleeping, eating in areas that were hit by depleted uranium, or DU

For some soldiers it marked the beginning of another type of battle. These five National Guard veterans claim they got sick from serving there.

Raymond Ramos, Iraq War Veteran: I just got to the point where I could not physically stand sometimes. The headaches were unbearable. I would get dizzy spells.

Hunter: They report similar ailments: painful urination, headaches and joint pain. They say Army doctors blame their symptoms on posttraumatic stress.

We showed them a tape the Army made in 1995, a tape the Army never distributed. It warned of potential DU hazards. The Army's expert on DU training concedes some information contained on the tape is true. For instance, inhaling radioactive particles can be harmful.

Unidentified Male: Alpha is the least penetrating but is the most hazardous if it does get into the body.

Hunter (on camera): So you're saying in part this is correct, but too much information?

Unidentified Male: It really doesn't provide any useful information to the soldier.

Hunter (voice-over): These vets say they were never warned about DU They're suing the Army for what they say is knowingly exposing them to DU dust and failing to properly treat

them.

Anthony Yonnone, Iraq War Veteran: They didn't furnish us with any of that information.

Hunter (on camera): At all?

Yonnone: At all.

Hunter: Does it make you angry?

Yonnone: Absolutely.

Hunter: Why?

Yonnone: Because here we are sick. We don't know why. The Army don't know why, and they're just calling us liars.

Hunter (voice-over): The veterans' claims against the government may be barred by a statute that protects the military from lawsuits by soldiers. But a judge is permitting the soldiers' claims of malpractice to go forward.

Dr. Asaf Durakovic, Uranium Medical Research Center: I personally call it not so depleted uranium.

Hunter: In the 1990s Dr. Asaf Durakovic studied DU health effects for the U.S. military. Now a private researcher, Durakovic says his own test of these veterans showed abnormally high levels of DU in their urine and that those levels pose a serious health threat.

Durakovic: There is genetic change in chromosoma of the regions (ph) in the people who have been found positive with depleted uranium.

Hunter: The military's overall health expert says tests on thousands of veterans from both Iraq wars have produced very few positive DU tests.

Dr. Michael Kirkpatrick, Defense Department Health Affairs: We are not seeing it in 74 individuals who are most heavily exposed, and that, I think, is really the golden standard if you take a look at people who had heavy exposure, internalization, some still having the depleted uranium in their bodies, still excreting very high levels in their urine, and their health appears at this point to be normal.

Hunter: Some scientists and politicians claim the Army's testing is not sophisticated enough. Connecticut state representative Pat Dillon helped pass legislation allowing her state to do its own testing of National Guardsmen.

Pat Dillon, Connecticut State Representative: It's a heavy metal. It gets absorbed into your bones. So I don't think that the test that they're using is sensitive enough to find whether or not you've been contaminated.

Hunter: The Army tells CNN its policy is to get every soldier training in depleted uranium and hazard protection. It also has an updated instructional video, produced in 2000.

We asked why these soldiers say not only did they not see the video, but they knew nothing about DU before going to Iraq.

Col. Mark Melanson, Walter Reed Army Medical Center: I'm not able to give you any statistics on who received training and who didn't receive training. I can just talk about the training that was provided and what the policy is.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

Hunter: Dr. Durakovic says one thing is for sure: a large part of Iraq is contaminated, particularly in the south where heavy tank battle took place. He calls it, quote, "a radiological sewer." The Army adamantly denies that.

O'Brien: When you go back and look at another war and another toxic agent, in that case Agent Orange in Vietnam. Veterans there had similar claims. Were sick because we were in contact with this Agent Orange. Ultimately, did they get claims from the military, and is that likely what's going to happen here?

Hunter: Some did, but it took decades. And let me tell you, Agent Orange is tame compared to radiological dust that you can breathe into your lungs, stays in your body forever, has a half life of 4.5 billion years. This stuff stays around forever. So it is – it is quite a controversy.

O'Brien: Keep us posted, Greg. Greg Hunter, thank you very much.

In just a little while, Sanjay Gupta will join us, and he'll explain a little bit more about the medical implications of contact to this depleted uranium – Alina. (…)

Cho: A few moments ago we heard Greg Hunter's investigation on depleted uranium and the danger it may pose for U.S. troops in Iraq. Chief medical correspondent Dr. Sanjay Gupta joins us from Atlanta on more with the medical side of this mystery.

Sanjay, good morning. So first things first, what are the symptoms of DU poisoning?

Dr. Sanjay Gupta, CNN Correspondent: There's sort of short-term symptoms and longer-term symptoms, and, you know, this is a difficult thing. The jury is still out among many researchers in terms of what's causing when and at what time.

But if you look at some of the early things, you can get things like nausea and vomiting as your G.I. tract sort of reacts to the depleted uranium. Also, kidney problems potentially and skin lesions.

There have been some case reports that it could possibly cause irritability and behavioral changes, as well, but that's not really nailed down.

Longer term, it can get a little bit more complicated. You might develop things like an immune system damage. So you could actually suppress your white blood cells, those sort of – those fighting cells of infection.

Lung cancer potentially as well, although, again, it's somewhat controversial studies. And potentially birth defects in the offspring of people who were exposed to depleted uranium, as well.

Alina, I should say – I think as Greg pointed out as well, the depleted uranium and its potential link to Gulf War syndrome is one of the most controversial things probably that exists in medicine. A lot of people sort of focused on it. Probably not enough studies as of

yet, still.

Cho: All right. So what about treatment? Is there any treatment for this?

Gupta: Well, not really. I mean, first of all, it's very hard to know, for example, if someone has actually been exposed. You can test it in the blood. You can actually get some blood tests that will tell if you have higher levels of the particular isotope associated with depleted uranium, but for the most part you've got to let the thing sort of run out its course.

It can cause damage to cells, and if those cells actually turn into tumor cells, for example, you obviously have to treat the cancer or remove the tumor, but it's hard to treat symptoms of depleted uranium poisoning overall.

Cho: All right. Dr. Sanjay Gupta, live for us in Atlanta. Sanjay, thank you.

Gupta: Thank you.

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