

Press Release from Representative

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**McDERMOTT INTRODUCES DEPLETED URANIUM BILL
HR 1483**

Washington, DC—Congressman Jim McDermott (D-WA) today introduced legislation requiring studies on the health and environmental impact of depleted uranium (DU) munitions, as well as cleanup and mitigation of depleted uranium contamination at sites within the United States where DU has been used or produced.

McDermott, a medical doctor, has been concerned about this issue since veterans of the Gulf War started experiencing unexplained illnesses. His concern deepened, he said, after visiting Iraq, where Iraqi pediatricians told him that the incidence of severely deformed infants and childhood cancers has skyrocketed.

“Depleted uranium is toxic and carcinogenic and it may well be associated with elevated rates of birth defects in babies born to those exposed to it,” said McDermott. “We had troops coming home sick after the Gulf War, and depleted uranium may be one of the factors responsible for that.”

Because of its density, the military uses depleted uranium as a protective shield around tanks. It is also part of munitions like armor-piercing bullets. Because it tends to spontaneously ignite upon impact, it is used to cause explosions.

But depleted uranium, a by-product of the uranium enrichment process, is also linked to grave health concerns because of its chemical toxicity and low-level radioactivity. When depleted uranium explodes, soldiers are exposed to DU in the form of alpha-emitting airborne particles that are inhaled and shrapnel that gets embedded in the body. They are also exposed through unprotected contact with equipment.

About 300 metric tons of depleted uranium was used in the Iraq during the Gulf War, and many citizens of Iraq as well as veterans of the Gulf War have experienced terrible health problems—many say as a consequence of depleted uranium. Increased rates of cancers, leukemia, and birth malformations are among the health problems that may be linked to DU.

The Pentagon has sent mixed signals about the effects of depleted uranium, at times claiming DU is not a health hazard, and at other times acknowledging the need for sophisticated protective gear and safety training regarding exposure to DU.

“The need for these studies is imperative and immediate,” said McDermott. “We cannot knowingly put the men and women of our armed forces in harm’s way.”

The Depleted Uranium Munitions Study Act of 2003 has several original co-sponsors, including Reps. Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.), Edward Markey (D-Mass.), John Conyers (D-Mich.), Stephanie Tubbs Jones (D-Ohio), Barbara Lee (D-Calif.), and Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.).

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