



KAHEA
THE HAWAIIAN-ENVIRONMENTAL ALLIANCE

March 29, 2007

Aloha Chairwoman Senator Baker and members of the Ways and Means Committee,

Thank you for hearing **HB 1452 S.D. 1** to monitor for depleted uranium (DU) contamination. **KAHEA: The Hawaiian-Environmental Alliance supports every effort to protect Hawai'i from the harms of military contamination.**

The "surprise" discovery of depleted uranium (DU) at Schofield Barracks is alarming because it confirms that the **U.S. Army's assurances that it can protect the public's health from its harmful activities is dubious**, at best. The military has failed to protect our health and our environment from its toxins. It is now up to us to assess the threat and take the proper steps to address the threat of this contamination and the many others like it.

Protecting

The Environmental Protection Agency documented **over 190 sites in Hawai'i that have been contaminated by military activities**. Nearly everyday the newspaper reveals a little more about the full-extent of contamination in our islands – explosives line our beaches, chemical weapons lurk in the depths, unexploded ordnance continues to be recovered from the most unlikely places.

Native Hawaiian

traditional and

Last year, we learned that despite assurances from every branch of the military to the contrary, **DU was used at Schofield Barracks. The Army did not proactively address this public health threat. Instead, they kept the discovery secret until they were forced by concerned citizens to confirm** that DU was discovered at Schofield Barracks.

customary rights

and our

In the year since those first DU rounds were discovered, the Army has not even met with the community, much less discussed clean up or monitoring protocols. Quite the opposite. In the year since those first DU rounds were discovered, **more unexploded ordnance known to contain DU has been uncovered and detonated in place without the proper safety precautions.**

fragile environment

DU poses a significant threat to the public's health. DU is a radioactive heavy metal. According to the International Atomic Energy Agency exposure to **DU – especially when inhaled – triggers mutation of genes is linked to extreme and debilitating birth defects, nervous system disorders, terminal kidney disease, and many types of cancer.**

The DU at Schofield Barracks poses a threat to the majority of O'ahu residents. Smoke from the periodic open burns at Schofield Barracks drift over the mountains into Waianae, potentially carrying tiny DU particles with it. **Water from the aquifer beneath Schofield Barracks feeds into three ground water sources**, including Pearl Harbor, the largest drinking water aquifer on the island. The International Atomic Energy Agency has confirmed that **DU does contaminate drinking water, if it is left in the environment to erode.** We must take action now to minimize the risks this DU poses to our health.

A similar scenario played out in Vieques, Puerto Rico, where military officials routinely denied that DU was ever used on the military training ranges there. Now, with **the people of Vieques suffering from unexplained illnesses and a cancer rate 27% higher than the national average, the military admits that DU was used in military training exercises at Vieques.**

It is clear that the public health threat posed by DU is not the military's primary concern. That is why **we must turn to you now, and ask that you please take the lead in protecting our health.** The Hawai'i Constitution requires the State to protect and promote the public's health (Article IX, §§ 1, 8). For far too long, the State has failed to exert this responsibility over the islands' most prolific polluter – the military.

Many states throughout the U.S. are taking steps to address the threat of DU in their communities. Four states, including California, have passed legislation mandating access to DU health screenings. An additional eight states are currently considering similar legislation.

For Hawai'i's unique history, H.B. 1452 represents a good first step towards fulfilling the State's responsibility to protect the health of every Hawai'i resident. Please consider expanding the testing required in H.B. 1452 SD 1 to other areas very likely to be contaminated, like Pohakuloa on Hawai'i Island. H.B. 1452 SD 1 should be passed because it provides the **greatest level of accuracy and independence in the sample-taking and analysis, while minimizing the financial burden** to the State of Hawai'i.

Mahalo piha,

Marti Townsend

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PO Box 270112 • Honolulu HI 96827
tel: (808) 524-8220 • fax: (808) 524-8221
www.kahea.org • kaheainfo@kahea.org