

Article URL: <http://starbulletin.com/2006/01/06/news/story06.html>
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Star Bulletin .com

Vol. 11, Issue 6 - Friday, January 6, 2006

GROUPS ACCUSE ARMY OF MISLEADING PUBLIC



CINDY ELLEN RUSSELL / CRUSSELL@STARBULLETIN.COM

Kyle Kajihira, program director of the American Friends Service Committee, spoke yesterday at a press conference at Iolani Palace regarding depleted uranium recovered at the Schofield Barracks range complex. The heavy metal was discovered by contractors clearing land for the U.S. Army's Stryker Brigade.

Uranium revelation upsets isle activists

Army e-mails detailing the presence of spent metal at Schofield are troubling, critics say

By Rosemarie Bernardo
rbernardo@starbulletin.com

SEVERAL environmental and native Hawaiian groups are accusing the Army of misleading the public after the groups discovered that a heavy metal known as depleted uranium was recovered at Schofield Barracks' range complex.

During a news conference yesterday, the groups said the Army has repeatedly assured the public that the heavy metal was never used in Hawaii.

"These recent revelations, then, indicate that the Army is either unaware of its DU (depleted uranium) and chemical weapons use or has intentionally misled the public. Both possibilities are deeply troubling," said Kyle Kajihiro, program director of the American Friends Service Committee and member of DMZ-Hawaii/Aloha Aina.

Some members of the various groups read about the depleted uranium in e-mails detailing documents submitted in federal court in December, showing that heavy metals were found at Schofield Barracks' range complex area during clearing efforts.

The e-mail was submitted as part of an ongoing discovery process. At the end of November, attorneys representing the 25th Infantry Division filed a motion in federal court to amend a 2001 settlement so soldiers can resume live-fire training at Makua Valley. The motion is scheduled to be heard Monday.

URANIUM AT SCHOFIELD



U.S. ARMY PHOTO VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS
Depleted uranium tail assemblies have been found in a Schofield Barracks range impact area, prompting some to question the Army's forthrightness. See story, Page A3.

The clearing was being done to prepare for the expansion of additional training space and the construction of a rifle and pistol range for a new Stryker brigade combat team.

Depleted uranium is a byproduct of radioactive enriched uranium and has been used by the U.S. military in bullets and other weapons designed to pierce armor. Some researchers suspect exposure to depleted uranium might have caused chronic fatigue and other symptoms in veterans of the first Gulf War, but there is no conclusive evidence it has.

In a letter sent yesterday to Maj. Gen. Benjamin Mixon, commanding general of the 25th Infantry Division, Kajihiro wrote that several groups were outraged by the use of the uranium, which they say poses a public health hazard even in small amounts.

During community discussion on the Stryker Brigade environmental impact statement in 2004, Army officials assured the public that depleted uranium was never used in Hawaii, Kajihiro said.

Fifteen tail assemblies from spotting rounds made of D-38 uranium alloy, also called depleted uranium, were recovered in August by Zapata Engineering, a contractor hired by the military to clear the Schofield Barracks' range impact area of unexploded ordnance and scrap metal, according to a news release from the 25th Infantry Division.

In an e-mail dated Sept. 19, a contractor told an Army official at Schofield: "We have found much that we did not expect, including recent find of depleted uranium. We are pulling tons of frag and scrap out of the craters in the western area to the point where it has basically turned into a manual sifting operation. Had this not been a CWM site, we would have moved mechanical sifters in about 5 weeks ago but the danger is just too high."

Dr. Fred Dodge, Waianae resident and member of Malama Makua, said, "DU is a heavy metal similar to lead. It can be toxic particularly to the kidneys," and could cause lung cancer if the metal in dust form is inhaled.

But U.S. Army Garrison Hawaii officials said the recovered depleted uranium has low-level radioactivity and does not pose a threat to the public.

The tail assemblies are about 4 inches in length and an inch in diameter. Army officials said they are from subcomponent remnants from training rounds associated with an obsolete weapon system that was on Oahu in the 1960s.

"The Army has never intentionally misled the public concerning the presence of DU on Army installations in Hawaii. This is an isolated incident and should not be considered as an attempt to misinform the public," Col. Howard Killian, commander of the U.S. Army Garrison Hawaii, said in a written statement.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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