

VETERANS CORNER

Depleted Uranium

Depleted Uranium (DU) is what is left over after Uranium is processed. DU has most of its radioactivity taken out during processing. DU is 40% less radioactive than natural uranium. Because of its density and low cost, DU is used by the U.S. military to make armor on tanks. DU is the best metal to use in armor to protect service men and women. It is also used to harden projectiles because DU munitions penetrate targets better. The first time DU was used by the US on a large scale was during the Persian Gulf War in the early 1990's.

DU cannot cause harm as long as it stays out of the body. Just being in the area of intact tanks or supplies made with DU will not result in exposure. In order to pose a risk to your health, "exposure" to a substance means that there must be a source and that it gets into the body. Even when DU munitions are fired close by, DU in the air is not a health threat as long as the metal stays out of the body. Exposure to DU only occurs if it gets into the body via metal fragments or dust-like particles that are inhaled into the lungs, are swallowed, or become embedded under the skin (shrapnel).

Exposure to DU is the highest for service members who served in the Gulf War, Bosnia and Operations Enduring Freedom/Iraqi Freedom, near fires or explosions involving DU munitions or armor. If DU shrapnel enters the body, it could remain in the body. DU particles can also be inhaled and taken into the body through smoke from burning DU-armored vehicles or exploded DU munitions. If you believe you may have been exposed to DU, contact your VA primary care provider or this office.

The Kings County Veterans Service Office can complete the DMV Veteran Status Verification Form for the new California Veteran Designation on your driver's license and also issues Veteran I.D. cards to honorably discharged veterans. Contact Scott Holwell if you would like to receive periodic veteran's information by email. There are many state and federal benefits and programs available to veterans and their dependents. To determine if you are eligible for any of these benefits, call or visit our office. We can and will assist you in completing all required application forms. You can get information on the Web from the Kings County Veterans Service Office webpage at www.countyofkings.com/vets.

Scott Holwell, retired Navy Master Chief Petty Officer, is the Veterans Service Officer for Kings County. Send your questions to the Veterans Service Office, 1400 W. Lacey Blvd, Hanford, CA 93230; call (559)852-2669; or e-mail scott.holwell@co.kings.ca.us.