

MARIA CANTWELL
WASHINGTON



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4705

April 13, 2006

The Honorable Donald H. Rumsfeld
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Rumsfeld:

I am writing to inquire about the status of ongoing research concerning the medical implications of exposure to depleted uranium in munitions and armor. As you know, research on the health effects of exposure to depleted uranium in military occupations is limited.

I understand that the Department of Defense's (DoD) strategy for addressing depleted uranium medical concerns consists of training and education, clinical treatment and medical surveillance, post-deployment screening, and medical follow-up in conjunction with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Since 1993, the VA has had an ongoing embedded depleted uranium fragment-monitoring program for individuals believed to be the most severely exposed to depleted uranium during the Gulf War.

I have several questions related to the U.S. Army Capstone Depleted Uranium Aerosols Study released in October 2004 (the "Capstone Study"). The Capstone Study indicated that a primary data gap was the human health effects from acute exposures to depleted uranium aerosols. It recommended that epidemiological studies be conducted on service members with positive depleted uranium bioassay results. (1.) To what extent has this recommendation been implemented? If it has been implemented, which research group is conducting the study and how is the study structured and funded? (2.) Are there any ongoing medical surveillance programs that provide data on possible incidences of pulmonary fibrosis and lung cancer among large numbers of Operation Desert Storm veterans exposed to aerosolized depleted uranium? (3.) In an effort to detect early pulmonary effects, have there been any high-resolution CT scans of the lungs of a large number Operation Desert Storm veterans exposed 12 or more years ago to aerosolized depleted uranium? The possible impact of depleted uranium contaminated with transuranic elements was outside the scope of the Capstone Study. (4.) Have there been other studies on depleted uranium contaminated with transuranic elements? Are there DoD or other monitoring programs in place to determine if trace amounts of transuranic elements vary among depleted uranium batches used to produce depleted uranium munitions and armor?

I appreciate your assistance answering these important questions. We owe it to our troops to make sure that we fully understand the science behind this issue. We must ensure that we adequately measure exposure to depleted uranium, study the long-term effects of exposure, and understand its full impact on the health of America's men and women in uniform.

Sincerely,

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator