

**FAKE NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS**

“open-air explosive tests involving depleted uranium”  
 The 1999 Sitewide Environmental Impact Statement (SWEIS), a DOE publication, draped a multitome window dressing over LANL’s foreordained expansion, or “Expanded Alternative.” The SWEIS proposed to expand plutonium pit production and the capacity of Area G, LANL’s nuclear waste dump, which borders — like the TA-36 sled track firing range — on the White Rock bedroom community.

The SWEIS also proposed to boost LANL’s yearly “expenditure” of depleted uranium at technical areas TA-14, TA-15 and TA-36 (the sled track site). “These facilities conduct open-air explosive tests involving depleted uranium and weapons development testing,” said the 2003 LANL Radionuclide Air Emissions report to the EPA in its list of “primary facilities responsible for radiological airborne emissions.”

The SWEIS “Alternatives” table for “high explosives testing” proposed an expanded DU “expenditure” from 2,900 pounds per year to 6,900 pounds per year “over all activities,” namely hydrodynamic tests (to expand from 30 to 100 per year), dynamic experiments, explosives research and testing, and munitions experiments. In one example of LANL’s conflicting numbers, the next page’s “Parameters” table for these sites instead proposed a tripling of DU expenditure from 2,882 pounds per year to 8,666 pounds per year, with a 5,950 pounds per year preponderance of DU earmarked for TA-15.

TA-15 is home for the DARHT (Dual Axis Radiographic Hydrodynamic Test) facility, with only one of its two long perpendicular arms now operational, since 1998. Before DARHT, between 1963 and 2004, hydrodynamic tests were performed by the PHERMEX (Pulsed High-Energy Radiation Machine Emitting X-Rays) facility, also at TA-15. Hydrodynamic tests are now touted as necessary for “stockpile stewardship,” or making sure old weapons still work. “However, in the event that this nation decides . . . that new nuclear weapons should be developed . . . DARHT could . . . assist in the development of weapons;” said the 1995 DARHT Record of Decision. Coincidentally, after Congress recently refused to fund new nuclear bunker busters, it did fund stockpile stewardship.

In hydrodynamic tests, accelerated particles race the length of DARHT to take split-second x-rays of exploding mock nuclear “primaries.” In real bombs these primaries are basically A-bombs, with plutonium at their cores, triggers for the H-bomb phase. Since if plutonium itself were used in these explosions, there would quickly be no DARHT facility, no LANL, etc., here again DU is plutonium’s favored stand-in.

These “hydroshot” explosions take place outside of DARHT’s 5-foot-thick reinforced concrete walls after the area has been cleared of personnel to a radius of 2,500 feet. Almost all such tests have blown up in the open air. But the 1995 DARHT Record of Decision decreed that environmental mitigation, or containment, of these explosions, be phased in over 10 years.

A 2004 LANL report by Jacek Dziejewski and Kurt Anast tackled the Record of Decision requirement that DARHT hydrotests be 40 percent contained, in spherical steel vessels, beginning with year six of DARHT’s operation (it’s now year seven). Clearly such containment vessels still inhabited only the drawing board in 2004. According to Dziejewski and Anast, one shot’s residue in these vessels could total 150 pounds of high explosives and 250 pounds of DU.

“LANL did not fully implement its program to develop vessel containment,” states a September 2005 DOE inspector general’s audit. LANL instead recently started “containing” these shots with foam housed in a tent, such as in the April 1, 2005, “Hydroshot 3625” touted in the Los Alamos National Laboratory Newsletter of April 11. The “contained” explosion pictured in that issue towered over the DARHT building. In a photo of the aftermath of a tent-contained shot, a tattered flag of fabric hangs from one surviving broken stick. Apparently data collection is easier through foam than through steel. But contaminated foam clean up can take up to two months, slowing the rate of hydroshots at DARHT. Thus in 2004 only seven of a scheduled 10 DARHT shots got fired. (Again, the 1999 SWEIS proposed 100 hydrodynamic tests per year.)

“Hydroshot 3625!” Have there indeed been 3625 hydroshots since the 1963 PHERMEX start-up? And have most hydroshots indeed exploded 250 pounds of DU, almost entirely in the open air, rivaling over the years the more than 340 tons of DU that battered Iraq in Gulf War I?

The 1999 SWEIS nowhere mentions any DU whatsoever to be expended at TA-11 (the drop tower), snubbing its accident simulations. Does this mean the DU allotted in the “Parameters” table for TA-36 (the sled track) was not for accident simulations either? Those 2,650 pounds per year of DU for TA-36 could total 30 annual fake accidents. Or, if expended as a 10-pound munition, that SWEIS amount could give us one explosion for every working day of the past six years of the Expanded Alternative. Or is LANL again simply “coming up with numbers”? And would those numbers logically exaggerate or would they downplay any toxic activities?

**EXTREMELY HOT AND EXPLOSIVELY EXPANDING**

Depleted uranium munitions are not nuclear weapons. Nuclear explosions by definition split the atom in an instantaneous, chain-reacting, destructive blast whose mind-boggling power still casts a black shadow over our time. DU explosions are extremely hot and explosively expanding fires. Both types of explosion spread radiation or radioactive substances into the environment. Both are thus radiological weapons.

Depleted uranium weapons pale before the inconceivable power of a thermonuclear bomb (albeit DU is a major bomb component and fissions during a nuclear explosion). The localized cremations and widespread eternal poisoning of DU can’t compare to the instant, complete, overwhelming devastation of nuclear weapons, which for all the 60 years since Hiroshima and Nagasaki were deemed unthinkable to use . . . until this administration’s lust for “usable” nukes.

The generals have never considered the use of DU unthinkable. These days DU far surpasses plutonium as the current greater agent of ruination because — touting a “depletion” that is wholly relative — the generals employ it with an absolute absence of inhibition, achieving devastation with sheer huge numbers and the passage of time, since radioactivity increases as uranium decays to hotter progeny. While those grapefruit-sized plutonium pits, core of the Bomb, wait in the wings, hopefully forever, the world now swims in DU. And the United States lavishes it on our designated enemies in profligate amounts. To what end?

When Philip Berrigan’s protest group was arrested in 2000 for attempting to dismantle two Warthog airplanes, they said in their statement defending their actions, entitled “Plowshares vs. Depleted Uranium”: “Attack a village with an A-10 Warthog and leave a trench. Attack a village with an A-10 Warthog firing depleted uranium and leave a poisoned graveyard — the people dead, plants dying or sterile, the earth eternally toxic.”

**WE HAVE EVERYTHING TO LOSE**

We often hear, during an Orange Alert or a Fox News program, that an evil terrorist attack might wreak destruction not with a complicated doomsday A-bomb but instead with a simple “dirty bomb.” These terrorist dirty bombs, we’re told, can poison the populace and render vast areas ecologically dead and unlivable through the spread of radiation. Well, the fearmongers are talking about bombs made of high explosives and DU, the same recipe being exploded at LANL in the open air and the same kind of evil weapon, by the thousands of tons, with which the United States is devastating the innocent civilians, women and children of Iraq and Afghanistan, plus the troops we send over there.

Former U.N. Commission on Human Rights member Karen Parker lists the internationally accepted humanitarian laws violated by DU weaponry: “The effect of a weapon must be limited in territory to the actual field of combat. Weapons must not continue to harm or kill after the war has ended. Weapons must not be unduly inhumane. Weapons must not cause long-lasting, wide-spread environmental damage.” And in 1996, the World Court said that under humanitarian law, countries must “never use weapons that are incapable of distinguishing between civilian and military targets,” a test the Hiroshima and Nagasaki A-bombs — and DU weapons — clearly fail.

People qualify for their coveted jobs at LANL, so often devoted to harm, by pledging to keep secret what they’re up to. Their reward is the “Q” security clearance, a big incentive not to tell the rest of us DU is deadly. Engaged in tasks dangerous to their own health, they seem to believe their own models, where local sickness attains insignificance compared to the total world population. This level of abstraction could soon render the total world population insignificant.

Helen Caldicott recently ruffled some feathers by calling LANL weapons experimenters war criminals. And Doug Rokke called DU weapons “criminal”: “We can’t do it. We can’t do it. It’s a crime against God. It’s a crime against humanity to use uranium munitions in a war, and it’s devastating to ignore the consequences of war. These consequences last for eternity.”

Even more than plutonium, depleted uranium has achieved the status of the ancient gods whose names you must not speak. A measure of how little human society has progressed is how much our bright, polite servants of annihilation pose as a priesthood of the nuclear cult, as they deny the consequences of what they do. But let’s call DU what it is: Devastation Unlimited.

LANL tests massive amounts of DU weaponry on sites bordering its own bedroom community. The bright idea for this weapon from hell may well have originated there. While blowing in the winds of our neighborhood, this weapon also travels abroad to destroy the futures of Iraq, Afghanistan and Bosnia/Kosovo, ballooning the whole world’s ever-growing “background radiation.”

U.S. leaders prattle about for new theaters to display their shock-and-awe sound-and-light show, playing on the nightly news like the latest hot video game. Coming to a neighborhood near you, courtesy of your local nuclear weapons lab. But as a little unfortunate collateral damage, great numbers of innocents sicken and die cruelly, their land sterilized, their genetic heritage imperiled, and appalling proportions of our troops return home sick, disabled and unable to beget normal children. A similar fate threatens the downwinders of DU-contaminated firing ranges, factories, storage facilities, open air “burns,” explosions and forest fires.

Isn’t this worth mentioning?

And is it not a crime?

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## Taking Action

- To submit questions or for further information or documentation of article sources on DU at LANL, visit the Peace Action website, [www.peace-actionunm.org/issues/dubumed.html](http://www.peace-actionunm.org/issues/dubumed.html).
- The Embudo Valley Environmental Monitoring Group (EVEMG) has a program of citizen-based monitoring for LANL air emissions in the Embudo Valley. You can contact them at P.O. Box 291, Dixon, NM 87527 or [semit@cybermesa.com](mailto:semit@cybermesa.com).
- To help promote both greater safety and environmental protection at regional nuclear facilities and federal policy changes that curb the proliferation of nuclear weapons, join Nuclear Watch of New Mexico at [www.nukewatch.org](http://www.nukewatch.org) or call (505) 939-7342.
- If you would like to work locally for global disarmament, please contact Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety at (505) 986-1973 or [www.nuclearactive.org](http://www.nuclearactive.org).

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