

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6732

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Health & Long-Term Care, February 2, 2006

Title: An act relating to exposure to depleted uranium and other hazardous materials by members and veterans of the national guard.

Brief Description: Studying military uranium exposure.

Sponsors: Senators Franklin and Rasmussen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Health & Long-Term Care: 2/2/06 [DP-WM].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Keiser, Chair; Thibaudeau, Vice Chair; Franklin, Kastama, Kline and Poulsen.

Staff: Sharon Swanson (786-7447)

Background: Depleted uranium is what is left over when most of the highly radioactive isotopes of uranium are removed for use as nuclear fuel or nuclear fuel weapons. The depleted uranium is used in armor-piercing munitions and in enhanced armor protection for some Abrams tanks.

Heavy metals such as uranium, tungsten, and lead have chemical toxicity properties that, in high doses, can cause adverse health effects.

Depleted uranium was used extensively in place of tungsten for ammunition by the United States and United Kingdom in the first Gulf War. A report issued by the Hague Peace Conference, dated May, 1999, states that at least 320 tons of depleted uranium was "lost" during the first Gulf War and that much of that was converted at high temperature into an aerosol, creating a mist or fog.

Once inhaled, very small particles of depleted uranium can reside in the lungs for years, slowly passing through the lung tissue into the blood. Uranium can be stored in bone, lymph, liver, kidney, or other tissues. Eventually, all uranium that gets into the bloodstream ends up in the kidneys prior to expulsion through urine.

Summary of Bill: Effective October 1, 2006, the Adjutant General of the Washington State National Guard is required to assist any eligible member or veteran in obtaining federal treatment services, who:

- 1) Has been assigned a risk level I, II, or III for depleted uranium exposure by his or her branch of service;
- 2) Is referred by a military physician; or

- 3) Has reason to believe that he or she was exposed to depleted uranium during service.

Eligible member is defined as a member of the Washington National Guard who served in the Persian Gulf War, or in an area designated as a combat zone during Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The bill directs the Adjutant General to submit a report on the scope and adequacy of training received by members of the National Guard on exposure to depleted uranium. Additionally, the report must include an assessment of the feasibility and cost of adding pre-deployment training concerning potential exposure to depleted uranium and other toxic chemical substances and the precautions recommended under combat and non-combat conditions. The report is due by October 1, 2006.

A task force which includes the Secretary of the Department of Health, or designee, the Adjutant General, the Director of Veterans Affairs, six legislative members, and additional members totaling fifteen is created. The task force is directed to complete several tasks by January 31, 2007, specifically: 1) initiate a health registry; 2) develop a plan for outreach to affected military personnel; and 3) prepare a report on potential exposure to depleted uranium and recommendations for precautions to be taken.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: Yes.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: The United States government and military has a history of lying to its veterans. In Vietnam, it was agent orange. Many veterans returned home to a life of cancer, children with birth defects, and eventually death. The military claimed to not know about agent orange. Our new veterans returning home from Iraq face similar challenges. We need to force the military to perform the proper tests to determine uranium poisoning. The current test only looks for uranium in urine. That test is only good for thirty days. The conclusive testing must look at blood results, tissue testing, and must be able to detect microscopic particles. Depleted uranium becomes microscopic. Troops breath it in and it settles in the lungs. In Mississippi, returning Persian Gulf male veterans are 1.7 times more likely to father children with birth defects. Female Persian Gulf veterans are 2.4 times more likely to give birth to a child with birth defects. This is only the beginning. England and Germany are conducting the proper tests. The United States needs to do the same for their veterans.

Testimony Against: None.

Who Testified: PRO: Terrence Zander, Veterans for Peace; Jerry Muchmore, Veteran; George Hill, M.D.; Peter Von Christierson, Depleted Uranium Study Team; Col. Ron Weaver, Washington Military Department; Harvey Brooks, National Association of Black Veterans.