

Is US covering up DU impacts in Iraq?

IRAQ Thanks to the unchecked looting of hospitals and the destruction of nearly all centres storing public health records in Iraq it is now impossible to document or report symptoms linked to the use of depleted uranium (DU) weapons in the country.

Furthermore, the US Agency for International Development has hired the World Health Organisation – at a cost of \$10m – to identify the Iraqi population's immediate health needs. This raises concerns about a possible conflict of interest. Any data-gathering of immediate health impacts of DU is being paid for by the US, which is the major entity potentially liable for costs relating to those impacts.

Iraqi government sites targeted for looting and burning have included the ministries of planning, information and health. This has fed speculation about a deliberate attempt having been made to destroy crucial data; information from pre-war health records would be critical to establishing whether levels of cancers and birth defects have increased in Iraq since the invasion.

US human rights lawyer Karen Parker, who has argued the illegality of DU at the UN since 1996, states: 'Since the UN first found that DU weaponry violated existing law, the evidence against DU is even stronger. I have always thought that the US fought so hard to maintain the sanctions regime against Iraq in part to cover up the effects of DU. Now the destruction of hospitals and the records compiled by Iraqi scientists on DU further supports a conclusion that the goal of the US is to cover up the truth. As the Red Cross has stated, it is the duty of the US forces to protect hospitals. The absolute failure to do so is a major violation of the Geneva Conventions.'

Sources indicate that US and UK forces used five times as much DU in the recent conflict than in the first Gulf war.