



## ENVIRONMENTAL SURVEY OF VIEQUES ISLAND PUERTO RICO

CONTACT: Jay Henson Region II 404 562 4738

The NRC conducted an inspection on June 6 - June 15, 2000, on Vieques Island, Puerto Rico, to determine if depleted uranium (DU) penetrators, that the U. S. Navy fired in the Live Impact Area (LIA) on February 19, 1999, have caused contamination to the surrounding environment and subjected members of the public to potential exposure. The inspection was conducted as a result of widespread public perceptions of DU in the environment.

NRC inspectors and representatives from the Radiological Health Division of the Puerto Rico Department of Health obtained direct radiation measurements and collected environmental samples in the LIA, naval firing range, and public locations on the island. The inspectors collected 114 samples of soil, vegetation, surface water, and sediment. The environmental samples were sent to the Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education (ORISE), Oak Ridge, Tennessee, for analysis. The entire set of samples was analyzed by gamma spectroscopy and alpha spectroscopy.

The NRC determined that based on the direct survey and environmental sample results, there was no spread of DU contamination to areas outside of the LIA and that contamination from the DU inside the LIA was limited to the soil immediately surrounding the DU penetrators. With the exception of the soil samples taken from holes where the Navy had recovered DU penetrators, neither the direct measurement nor the environmental sample results identified the presence of radioactive materials exceeding those associated with naturally occurring radioactive materials routinely found in the environment. The NRC concluded that members of the public outside of the LIA were not exposed to the DU that was fired into the LIA. The inspectors determined that members of the public could only have received measurable dose from the DU penetrator event if they directly accessed a DU penetrator for extended periods of time. The NRC is not aware of anybody who may have directly accessed a DU penetrator.

The results of the NRC inspection will be documented in an inspection report expected to be issued by September 22. The report will be sent to the Puerto Rico Secretary of Health, Mayor of Vieques, and in addition, the Center for Disease Control who had received a petition regarding a concern about increase cancer rates at Vieques. Region II is in the process of arranging a meeting between the Regional Administrator, the Puerto Rico Secretary of Health, and Mayor of Vieques in the first week of October and would hold a press conference following that meeting. The Navy is continuing DU recovery efforts.