PDR

DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
2000 NAVY PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20350-2000

IN REPLY REFER TO
5104
N455/9U595543
1 June 99

U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Region II
61 Forsyth Street, SW
Suite 23T85
Atlanta, GA 30303

Gentlemen:

SUBJECT: IMPROPER EXPENDITURE OF DEPLETED URANIUM MUNITIONS

This letter is submitted per 10 CFR 30.50 as a follow up report to an incident which occurred on February 19, 1999 concerning depleted uranium (DU) ammunition expended on the Live Impact Area of the Vieques Naval Range, Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Facility, Naval Station Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico. The Naval Radiation Safety Committee initially reported this incident to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission Region II verbally on March 5, 1999 and submitted a written report April 1, 1999.

As noted in our April 1, 1999 letter, a contributing cause of the incident was the failure of individuals to follow standard ammunition handling protocols. Four widely used instructions within the Navy and Marine Corps dictate that the "Use Restrictions" of all ammunition must be checked in the Notice of Ammunition Reclassification (NAR) database before it is issued or received. The weapons community readily adheres to this protocol. However in this case, the responsible individuals did not initially check the Notice of Ammunition Reclassification (NAR) database before issuing or receiving the depleted uranium munitions. The NAR specifies that the 25m DU rounds are designated as "war reserve" and as such, are to be used during combat only and are restricted from peacetime or training use. A Joint Navy-Marine Corps investigation was conducted to determine additional facts surrounding the incident. The scope of the investigation covered all aspects of the issue, receipt, and firing of the depleted uranium rounds. It included personnel interviews and a thorough review of Navy and Marine Corps ammunition supply processes. A formal investigation report has been completed and is currently being reviewed for approval through the chain-of-command.

9907070378 990601
PDR ADOCK 03029462
C PDR

I672

In response to this incident, the Naval Radiation Safety Committee has taken the following corrective actions in addition to those described in our April 1, 1999 report.

- The Marine Corps issued a naval message to all ammunition activities reemphasizing the prohibition of firing the 25mm and 120mm depleted uranium rounds for peacetime and training use.

- Applicable Navy and Marine Corps instructions have been revised to include the specific use restrictions for depleted uranium ammunition.

- A self-inspection checklist for compliance with the Naval Radioactive Material Permit (NRMP) for depleted uranium munitions was forwarded to all storage facilities.

- The Marine Corps has initiated the inclusion of specific depleted uranium information in its Ordnance Occupational Courses.

Since our April 1, 1999 report, no further recovery of depleted uranium rounds has occurred due to the recent access restrictions imposed on the Vieques Inner Range. Further recovery operations are planned to commence in middle August to September 1999 timeframe and Navy will forward a report of recovery actions on or around the first week of September 1999.

Sincerely,

G.A. HIGGINS
Commander, MSC, U.S. Navy
Executive Secretary
Naval Radiation Safety Committee

Copy to:
CMC SD
NAVSEA 04N
NAVSEADET RASO
NSWC CRANE