Depleted uranium may post health hazard

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A U.S. study suggests exposure to particles of depleted uranium might increase the risk of genetic damage and lung cancer.

Depleted uranium is the material remaining after removal or depletion of the U-238 isotope. With a density about twice that of lead, depleted uranium is ideal for use in military armor and munitions.

But now John Pierce Wise Sr. and colleagues at the University of Southern Maine have discovered depleted uranium dust produced in combat creates potentially frequent and widespread exposure for soldiers and non-combatants inhaling such dust particles.

In their study, the researchers tested the effects of depleted uranium dust on cultures of human lung cells.

"These data suggest that exposure to particulate DU may pose a significant genotoxic risk and could possibly result in lung cancer," the scientists said.

The study is to be reported in the May 21 issue of the journal *Chemical Research in Toxicology*.