

Hot Properties, DU and Dirty Deeds at Lowry

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Do you know about DU's DU? That's the University of Denver's role in top secret military weapons testing at the former Lowry Bombing Range southeast of Denver, now slated for massive residential development. DU tested DU (depleted uranium) weapons there for years, records show.

Governor Bill Owens and his appointees to the Colorado State Land Board now describe the former military blasting area as the "Jewel of the Front Range." The state agency, which now owns the land, is charged with raising revenues to finance K through 12 public education. CU's Real Estate Group advised the state board in its land use options, as Governor Owens pronounced a vision of turning the bombing range into Colorado's second largest city.

Doing some digging, RMPJC's Nuclear Nexus Project has found a few flaws in the "jewel" being overlooked as prospects for huge profits loom for some powerful players. Within the sprawling 23,000 acres, the U.S. Army, Navy and Air Force conducted various top-secret activities, including DU testing. In what one state health official termed a "dirty transfer," the Land Board acquired the former military site and is now considering developers' plans to build lucrative communities on the contaminated land.

DU, or depleted uranium, is a super-dense radioactive waste residual from atomic weapons production. Saddled with huge DU stockpiles, the Pentagon is "recycling" DU wastes into weapons, tips for bombs and bullets, and armament for tanks. DU weapons cannot be used in war without harming the health of combatants and non-combatants alike, however, and groups worldwide are calling for a ban on their use as illegal and immoral, given their long-lived radioactive legacy. An alarming rise in the incidence of Iraqi babies being born with birth defects has been documented, as well as in infants born to families of returning Iraq war soldiers exposed to DU on the battlefield.

Here in the U.S., DU - with a half life of 4.5 billion years - has been tested at a number of sites around the country, contaminating the environment and posing the same risks here at home as those in far away war zones. One such site, RMPJC has revealed, is the Lowry Bombing Range near Denver.

The University of Denver's Research Institute conducted the test firings of DU weapons for the military at the Lowry site, records obtained by RMPJC's

Nuclear Nexus Project show.

None of this was mentioned by the Lowry Range Property Group (LRPG LLC), one of four teams vying for development rights, headed by Denver billionaire and telecommunications magnate Donald Sturm, in a two-hour presentation to the board of political appointees November 6th. Sturm is also a trustee of the University of Denver and its biggest donor, giving millions to the school in recent years. Instead, “sustainability” and “environmentally friendly” aspects of LRPG’s proposal were touted during their November 6th presentation, including a “bonus,” that they’d power their development off of gasses from the nearby Lowry Landfill.

Unmentioned? The fact that the landfill’s loaded with radioactive wastes, including plutonium, as the EPA’s 1994 Superfund Record of Decision documents.

Following this presentation, a total of nine minutes for public comment was allowed. In three minutes allotted, RMPJC urged that any development on former DU test lands be prohibited, noting that while some DU ordnance and soil “hot spots” were removed in 1999, this would not adequately protect a residential community from risks of exposure to fine, radioactive DU dusts through inhalation or ingestion. These could pose potent potential health threats, not only to construction workers and future residents, but their progeny, a radioactive legacy to future generations.

DU’s DU and potential pollution liabilities may literally be covered up. If development plans proceed, a wealthy DU donor stands to profit directly, should the LRPG be selected. This raises important questions not only about the land’s dirty history, but wider issues of ethics and accountability in how our cash-starved public schools and institutions of higher education are financed, when important public health considerations are being masked for private and political gain.

For protection against radioactive threats locally and globally, we must wrest back democratic control of our public institutions, now being increasingly overtaken by the growing military/academic/industrial/media complex, intertwined with the nuclear weapons nexus.

A good place to start is at the Lowry Bombing Range, the “Jewel of Greenwashing on Colorado’s Front Range.”

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