

Reports raised worries about defective gear

CDTF Takes Extra Care Inspecting Chemical Suits

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The chemical suits are put through an autoclave unit to ensure proper hygiene.

Responding to a recent report of defective chemical suits, officials at the Chemical Defense Training Facility (CDTF) at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, have taken measures to ensure that there is no cause for alarm. “None of those suits are currently in use at the facility,” said Jack Freeman, CDTF protective-clothing and equipment supervisor.

A Pentagon inspector general’s report in February revealed that some manufacturer defects in the battle-dress overgarments, or BDOs, were discovered in certain production lots. Pentagon officials, however, were quick to point out that service members were never in danger of being issued defective suits.

“They are maintained and checked to make sure that at no time do we ever put any of our armed forces in jeopardy in that serious environment,” said Lieutenant General Thomas Glisson, Defense Logistics Agency director, in a 28 February news briefing.

Because the training at the CDTF is conducted in an environment where real toxic agents are used on a daily basis, immediate measures were taken here to ensure safety. “As soon as we received word on the defective suits, we checked our inventory. We pulled every BDO we had,” said Freeman.

During their investigation, CDTF workers discovered that some of the BDOs in their inventory did come from the defective lot. However, no actual defects—tears, holes, or irregular stitching—were found on any of the suits. “We inspected them and didn’t find anything wrong with them. Still, we’re keeping them separated from our active inventory,” said Freeman.

Despite their concern, officials at the CDTF said they did not expect to find any defects, given the thorough inspection process the training gear goes through. “There’s an immediate sense of need here to keep a high level of safety,” said John Morrissey, CDTF deputy director. “We know we’re putting students in a toxic environment on a daily basis. That’s why we have very thorough safety measures and procedures.”

Along with the features that are built into the design of facility, safety is also ensured by the rigorous procedures workers follow to inspect the gear that is used. Once the BDOs are worn in training, they are stored overnight in stainless steel bins. The next morning the uniforms are hung on racks to release any vapors that might still be on them. Sampling ports constantly monitor the BDOs to detect toxic levels. Any BDO that comes in direct contact with an agent is destroyed.

Once deemed safe, the BDOs are cleaned in an autoclave unit. They are then run through a computer-barcode system that tracks their usage. BDOs are certified safe for four uses, then destroyed. After the garments are tracked on the computer, they are put through a thorough visual inspection. Zippers, drawstrings, and snaps are checked to make sure they are in working order. “We look for cuts, tears, holes, or loose seams—any sign of deterioration,” said Freeman. “No repair work is done on the BDOs. If any defects are discovered, the garment is destroyed,” said Freeman.

A worker rarely finds a defect. Freeman said that out of 1,000 suits, perhaps one may have a defect. Most problems occur when a student ties a drawstring into a knot that must be cut, requiring the garment to be destroyed. "Generally speaking, they are well-manufactured. It's very rare that we find a defect with the suits themselves," said Freeman. "About 85 percent of them see their way through the use cycle."

After the visual inspection, the suits are placed back into the active inventory to be used again. Given the training environment, the facility, employees, and equipment go through yearly inspection and testing to further ensure that safety standards are maintained.

Ann Biley, a quality assurance specialist with the Defensive Chemical Test Equipment Division at Pine Bluff Arsenal, Arkansas, during a recent visit to the CDTF, said the facility is up to standards. "We look at everything—the inspectors, the procedures, and equipment. From what I've seen, everything's in compliance," she said.

For Freeman, ensuring safety is a personal matter, having served 24 years in the Chemical Corps and four years as a CDTF instructor. Freeman said he had to rely on his equipment every day in the training environment; therefore, he understands the concern for safety. "It's imperative that soldiers have confidence in their equipment, especially if it's equipment that's going to save their lives," he said. "That's why we take very seriously the work we do here. We take our time to do it right because we know there are students counting on us."

At the time this article was written, SPC Peter Fitzgerald was assigned to the Headquarters Company, Maneuver Support Center, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, working in the Public Affairs Office as a staff writer for the post newspaper, the GUIDON. He enlisted in the Army in March of 1999 as an E4 and completed basic training in May 1999 and AIT in September 1999. In October 1999, SPC Fitzgerald reported to Fort Leonard Wood for his first assignment.

Chemical Corps Annual Writing Contest

The **Chemical Corps Annual Writing Contest** is an official function of the Chief of Chemical. The competition is open to military personnel in all branches and services, including allied nations, and to civilian personnel of any nationality.

Each article should be submitted as a double-spaced manuscript in paper copy accompanied with a disc in Microsoft® Word format. The article should be between 500 and 2,500 words in length and supported by appropriate footnotes, bibliography, and graphics/photos. Hard-copy photos are preferred; however, if digital photos are submitted, they should be saved at a dpi/ppi of 200 or more and at 100 percent of actual size. In addition to the manuscript, submissions should include a cover sheet with the author's name, title, organization, complete address, e-mail address, and a short biography.

To ensure anonymity in the selection process, the author's name should not appear in the manuscript itself. The panel will rank submissions on a 100-point scale with up to 40 points assigned for writing clarity, 30 points for relevance to chemical soldiers of the twenty-first century, 20 points for general accuracy, and 10 points for originality.

First-, second-, and third-place winners will receive cash awards of \$500, \$300, and \$150 respectively from the Chemical Corps Regimental Association. Certificates of Achievement will be given to all three winners plus those who receive "Honorable Mention." All winning essays will be published in the July 2001 issue of the Army Chemical Review. The deadline for the contest is 30 September 2000. Send your entry to:

Command Historian
U.S. Army Chemical School
320 Engineer Loop, Suite 44
Fort Leonard Wood, MO 65473-5267
Or e-mail: wrightb@wood.army.mil

This year the Chief of Chemical has approved two themes to choose from for the 2000 Writing Contest. They are: "**Chemical Corps operations in complex terrain and urban environment**" and "**Expanded WMD/NBC threat in contingency operations.**"