FACT SHEET

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Deseret Test Center

Whistle Down

Shortly after President Kennedy's inauguration in 1961, the Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, directed that a total review of the U.S. military be undertaken. The study consisted of 150 separate projects. The chemical and biological warfare review was known as Project 112. As part of the Project 112 review, the Joint Chiefs of Staff convened a working committee that recommended a research, testing, and development program for chemical and biological weapons. To oversee this program, the Deseret Test Center was established at Fort Douglas, Utah, in 1962. Both land-based and ship-based tests were conducted during the period 1962 – 1973. The Deseret Test Center closed in 1973.

Whistle Down was primarily an investigation of the existence, nature, and extent of the hazard from Sarin nerve agent and VX nerve agent on environmental clothing, snow, and frozen ground.

Manikins dressed in arctic clothing and white camouflage overgarments were exposed downwind of the burst of Sarin-filled munitions as well as downwind of a detonated VX-filled M23 land mine.

Whistle Down was conducted at the Gerstle River test site, Fort Greely, Alaska, from December 1, 1962 to February 5, 1963.

Test Name	Whistle Down (DTC Test 63-3)
Testing Organization	US Army Deseret Test Center
Test Dates	December 1, 1962 – February 5, 1963
Test Location	Gerstle River test site, Fort Greely, Alaska
Test Operations	To investigate the existence, nature, and extent of the hazard from Sarin and VX nerve agents on environmental clothing, snow, and frozen ground.
Participating Services	US Army, Deseret Test Center personnel
Units and Ships Involved	Not identified
Dissemination Procedures	Sarin-filled M55 rockets and M121 155mm shells,and VX-filled M23 land mines were remotely detonated.
Agents, Simulants, Tracers	Sarin Nerve Agent, VX Nerve Agent
Ancillary Testing	Not identified
Decontamination	Not identified
Potential Health Risks Associated with Agents, Simulants, Tracers	Sarin Nerve Agent (GB) Sarin gas is a volatile and lethal nerve agent. It can enter the body by inhalation, ingestion, through the eyes, and to a lesser extent through the skin. After exposure to a sufficient dose, human symptoms may occur within minutes and include runny nose, watery eyes, difficulty breathing, dimness of vision, confusion, drowsiness, coma, and death. Very little information is available regarding long-term health effects following exposures to low levels that do not cause acute symptoms. No information is available regarding potential carcinogenicity. An Institute of Medicine committee concluded that there was insufficient evidence for or against an association between low-level sarin exposure and long-term

	health effects. (Sources: http://www.bt.cdc.gov/Agent/Nerve/Sarin/Sarin.asp [as of February 13, 2002] Institute of Medicine (National Academies), Gulf War and Health (vol.1): Depleted Uranium, Pyridostigmine Bromide, Sarin, Vaccines. National Academy Press, Washington DC, 2000.) VX Nerve Agent – (Synonyms: Phosphonothioic acid, VX) VX nerve agent is extremely lethal. It is an oily liquid that is clear, odorless, and tasteless. Death usually occurs within 10 15 minutes after absorption of a fatal dosage. VX nerve agent is one of the most toxic substances ever synthesized. Symptoms of overexposure may occur within minutes or hours, depending upon the dose. They include: constriction of pupils, headaches, runny nose, salivation, tightness in the chest, nausea, vomiting, anxiety, difficulty in thinking, muscle twitches, tremors, and weakness. With severe exposure, symptoms progress to convulsions and respiratory failure. There is little information available regarding the long-term human health effects of exposure to low doses of VX. (Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention http://www.bt.cdc.gov/Agent/Nerve/VX/ctc0006.asp [as of January 25, 2002] Zajtchuk R (ed.), Textbook of Military Medicine (part 1, Medical Aspects of Chemical and Biological Warfare, 1997), Office of the Army Surgeon General, Washington DC, 1997. SBCCOM Online, Edgewood Chemical Biological Center http://in1.apgea.army.mil:80/RDA/msds/vx.htm [as of April 2, 2002]

	World Health Organization, Department of Sustainable Development & Environmental Protection, http://209.61.192.180/phe/factsheet_5.htm [as of April 2, 2002] Department of the Army Pamphlet 40-8: Occupational Health Guidelines for the Evaluation and Control of Occupational Exposure to Nerve Agents GA, GB, GD, and VX http://books.army.mil:80/cgi-bin/bookmgr/BOOKS/P40_8/CCONTENTS [as of February 5, 2002])