

## **U.S. Military Requests Biological, Chemical Attack Cleanup Foam**

*Washington, Sept. 24 (Bloomberg) -- The U.S. Central Command has made "an urgent request" for a new foam that removes chemical and biological agents from tanks, trucks, armored personnel carriers and sensitive electronics, officials say. The non-toxic foam developed by the Energy Department's Sandia National Laboratories would replace the decontaminant "DS2" -- a corrosive liquid proven harmful to soldiers and only marginally effective against biological agents, officials said.*

*"We are pursuing an urgent request from CENTCOM to see if we can supply some of the Sandia foam," Dr. Anna Johnson-Winegar, deputy assistant secretary for chemical and biological defense, said. CENTCOM would run any military operation against Iraq. Iraq has chemical and biological weapons and "you'd have to assume they'd be used" against attacking U.S. troops, General Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the U.S. Congress last week. The U.S. is now inoculating its forces against the deadly toxin anthrax, he said. Iraq is believed to have aerial bombs, rockets, artillery and aerosols that can dispense pathogens such as anthrax and botulism. It also has plans to deploy chemical and biological weapons using ballistic missiles, the U.K. said today. Myers said the U.S. since the 1991 Persian Gulf War has improved its protective suits, gas masks and sensors that detect toxic chemicals or biological agents. "We also have decontamination sets today that are new since a decade ago," he told the Senate Armed Services Committee.*

*The new foam's primary use is to wash weapons, armored vehicles, large containers and even airfields. It's proven effective against all known chemical and biological agents, said Mark Tucker, a Sandia researcher who helped develop the foam. The sudsy foam is hosed on by soldiers in protective gear and can break down the agents within 30 minutes into harmless compounds, Tucker said. CENTCOM's "urgent request" for the new foam was approved August 13 by the Pentagon and will be given "the most expeditious" treatment, Johnson-Winegar's office said in a statement. The Joint Chiefs of Staff are "coordinating an effort to meet this urgent requirement," the statement said. The foam was licensed to two small, privately held companies in 2000: Modec Inc. in Denver*

*and Enviro Foam Technologies Inc. in Huntsville, Alabama. The Pentagon said it hasn't determined how much foam it will need. "We need to be prepared for any contingency," the Central Command said in a statement.*

### *Electronics at Risk*

*The military's increasing dependence on electronics has highlighted the dangers of DS2, a corrosive.*

*"We need to take care of everything from sensitive electronic equipment -- you can't spray DS2 on that -- to people with open wounds that might be contaminated with chemical or biological agents, and large areas like an airfield," Johnson-Winegar said. "What would the Army do if they started rolling tanks in Iraq" and were attacked with chemical and biological weapons, said Peter Beucher, chief executive of Enviro Foam Technologies. "What would they have to keep them rolling -- nothing." "We've got a lot of inquiries from commanders in the region," Beucher said. "The military has got to get off the dime. It's a big decision that impacts training, logistics, doctrine."*

*Modec chief executive Brian Kalamanka said the company has 100,000 gallons of foam on hand, enough for about 3,000 vehicles. Modec has sold its foam to the FBI, New York City and the Air Force for use to decontaminate Ramstein Air Force Base in Germany, the service's primary base in Europe.*

### *Franks Briefed on Foam*

*President George W. Bush is asking Congress and the United Nations for resolutions requiring that Iraq be disarmed and rid of all weapons of mass destruction. CENTCOM is responsible for U.S. military operations in the Middle East and Central Asia. It directed the Afghan war, monitors the no-fly zones over Iraq and is planning for a potential attack on Iraq. CENTCOM commander Army General Tommy Franks was briefed on August 13 by Modec's Kalamanka. Franks "and the staff learned about the capabilities of the decon foam and application system," and Franks observed "the latest generation of decontamination systems," CENTCOM said in a statement.*

### *DS2's Flaws*

*DS2, which has been in Army stocks since the 1950s, is only marginally effective*

*against biological agents, said Mark Cantrell, a chemist with the U.S. Army's Soldier, Biological, and Chemical Command. "It was designed to be effective against chemicals," Cantrell said. "If there's any effectiveness against biological agents, it's serendipitous. It wasn't designed for it." The U.S. General Accounting Office in an April 1990 report recommended the Pentagon remove DS2 from the inventory because "tests have shown it can severely damage some of the Army's equipment, including major systems such as the M1A1 tank." "For example, DS2 can cause the M1 tank's electronics and optical equipment to become inoperable," GAO wrote in recommending purging the inventory. Thousands of gallons of DS2 were shipped to the Saudi Arabia during the six-month buildup before the Persian Gulf War. None of the decontaminant was used because Iraq didn't fire chemical or biological agents against U.S. troops.*

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