

## Soviets Visit Defence Research Establishment Suffield

A delegation of 10 Soviet scientists and military officers visited Defence Research Establishment Suffield (DRES) July 17-19, 1989, to observe the destruction of chemical agents and share information about technical issues and environmental safety related to the destruction. The delegation was headed by Mr. Sergei Batsanov, the USSR's representative to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. This was the first Soviet visit to a Canadian military base since the Second World War.

Since 1941 Suffield, located in Alberta about 275 km southeast of Calgary, has been the site of a research program into defence against chemical and biological weapons. During the past 20 years, field testing with chemical agents has been limited to the small quantities required for testing defensive equipment and training Canadian Forces personnel in defensive measures.

In the early 1970s, a clean-up of the chemical munitions and agents remaining on the base as part of wartime reserves was authorized. Destruction began of approximately 700 tons of mustard gas stored in tanks, as well as of small quantities of other chemical warfare agents. Most of this material had been in storage since the Second World War. Unfortunately, a breakdown of equipment and conflicting priorities for resources prevented completion of the operation. In early 1988, the then Minister of National Defence, Mr. Perrin Beatty, became aware of some 16 tons of agents and 150 tons of contaminated material remaining to be disposed of. A report commissioned by Mr. Beatty and authored by Mr. William Barton, then Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security, discussed the activities at DRES in the area of chemical and biological defences, and noted the material still awaiting destruction.

With the presentation of the Barton Report at a press conference on January 25, 1989, Mr. Beatty announced that immediate action would be taken to complete the clean-up. At the same time, he issued an invitation to Soviet officials to visit DRES and observe the chemical agent destruction process.

During the July visit, the Soviet delegation received briefings on:

- the DRES Experimental Proving Ground, where the chemical agent disposal and storage sites are located;
- Project Swiftsure, the project to dispose of chemical and hazardous wastes from the Experimental Proving Ground;
- decontamination research and techniques;
- recent developments in the therapy and prophylaxis of organophosphate poisoning; and
- techniques for the verification of chemical agents.

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### Opportunity for dialogue on concerns relevant to CW Convention

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The delegation toured the DRES facilities and observed the techniques and equipment used for the destruction of chemical agents. The Soviets expressed particular interest in techniques of environmental protection and personnel safety during the destruction process. The USSR was then completing construction of a large plant at Chapayevsk in the Shikany military area, about 1,000 km east of Moscow, to destroy an estimated 50,000 tons of chemical agents. Because of environmental safety concerns, it has since announced that the facility will not be used for chemical weapon destruction but rather for training in defensive measures against chemical weapons.

The visit was hosted by the Department of National Defence. It concluded with consultations in Ottawa on July 20 between the Soviet delegation and officials of External Affairs and International Trade Canada.

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### Destruction process at DRES expected to be completed by end of 1991

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The visit provided considerable opportunity for officials from both countries to pursue an open dialogue on technical and other matters, including local safety and environmental concerns, of relevance to the conclusion and implementation of a Chemical Weapons Convention. Canada participates fully in every aspect of the negotiations at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva on reaching a global, comprehensive and effectively verifiable convention banning chemical weapons. The Soviet visit to DRES was intended to contribute to an increased level of openness and exchange of technical information which, it is hoped, will expedite these negotiations.

It should be noted that past Canadian statements relating to the non-possession of chemical weapons were made at a time when "chemical weapons" were generally understood to mean usable chemical-filled munitions. Chemical agents then existing at DRES were neither stored in usable munitions nor were they part of an operational military capability. To date at DRES, the remaining nerve agent containers have already been opened and the contents destroyed. The destruction of remaining mustard gas and contaminated material must await the construction of a new incinerator. The destruction process is expected to be completed by the end of 1991.

Copies of the Barton Report can be obtained by writing National Defence Headquarters (Director General Information), 101 Colonel By Drive, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0K2, or by telephoning (613) 995-2534. □