

Army's 'Instant' Nerve Gas

Washington

The Army has plans to manufacture a "binary" nerve gas, composed of two relatively harmless chemicals that mix to become lethal only after they are fired at a target.

The U.S. has renounced the use of nerve gas and other chemical weapons, but according to the Army maintains a "deterrent

stockpile" in case another country uses them first.

First word of the decision came yesterday from Representative Les Aspin (Dem-Wis.), a persistent critic of Pentagon spending. Representative F. Edward Hebert, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, said Aspin learned about it in an Army letter sent last Tuesday to all members of Congress.

A spokesman said one of the chemicals, similar to a home pesticide, would be manufactured and loaded into artillery shells at the Pine Bluff, Ark., arsenal. The second chemical purchased commercially, would have to be added to the shell on the battlefield before firing, he said.

The major reason given for producing the binary

gas, according to the Army, is to reduce the danger of storing nerve gas munitions.

The letter said development of the binary gas "will permit the disposal of present stocks of nerve agent as they are replaced by the binaries."

Existing nerve gas munitions, stored in Colorado and Utah, are lethal at all times.

Aspin said "the real issue here is a major escalation of

the balance of terror," not the elimination of the danger from stored nerve gas munitions.

Hebert, a persistent Pentagon defender, called Aspin's remark "demagoguery" and said that "if Mr. Aspin has any evidence or can document any wrongdoing in this particular instance, then again I say 'put up or shut up'."

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