

Abrams TSM: Halon Extinguishers Are Not a Health Hazard

The Tank System Manager (TSM) for the Abrams tank is making an attempt to clear up misconceptions about the health effects of Halon 1301, the chlorofluorocarbon-based gas used in the tanks' fire-extinguishing system. "Some soldiers mistakenly believe that Halon is harmful to them, and some even believe that breathing the discharged agent is deadly," said COL James H. Nunn.

What seems to be fueling these false rumors, he said, is the plan to phase out Halon. Because this gas, and other so-called CFCs, are believed to deplete the Earth's ozone layer, there is a continuing scramble to replace Halon with less environmentally destructive substances. They are not being phased out because of health effects. In some cases, the Army is substituting CO2 extinguishers for Halon, *but not in*

tank crew compartments, because the CO2, which is heavier than air, sinks to the bottom of the crew compartment, which is already a small, enclosed, sealed space. Discharge of a CO2 extinguisher within that small volume easily exceeds safe concentrations as it displaces the air, and could suffocate crewmen. This is not the case with Halon.

Halon 1301 is approved by the Surgeon General for safe use in crew, engine, and hand-held fire extinguishing systems.

The only fatalities traceable to the fire extinguishing systems have been caused by improper maintenance when installing and removing the pressurized bottles. Unrestrained, they can become lethal missiles within the confines of the tank's crew compartment.