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Subject: A CONTRACTOR TO DEFENCE HAS SUFFERED A SUSPECTED HEART
ATTACK WHILE ON-SITE AT COLUMBOOLA, QLD.

Comment:
Action Area HI

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HOT ISSUE BRIEF

A CONTRACTOR TO DEFENCE HAS SUFFERED A SUSPECTED HEART ATTACK WHILE ON-SITE AT COLUMBOOLA, QLD.

SENSITIVITY: Due to media interest in the Columboola Old Chemical Weapons Destruction Project, Defence is hosting an open media day at the site on Wednesday 23 March 2011. There is no connection of this incident to the handling or exposure to chemical munitions, nevertheless the issue may be of interest to the media.

KEY ISSUES:

- **A subcontractor to Defence suffered a suspected heart attack, the morning of 21 March 2011, while working on machinery at the site for the Old Chemical Weapons Destruction Project at Columboola.**
- **The contractor is a [REDACTED] working for [REDACTED], deployed to Australia as a technician engaged for the purpose of assembly and testing the destruction chamber.**
- **The contractor was attended to by site paramedics and the QLD Ambulance service.**
- **This incident is unrelated to any release of chemical agent or handling of old chemical weapons. All chemical munition items scheduled for destruction are secured in an ISO shipping container several hundred metres from the worksite.**

- **At 1300 hrs 21 March 2011, the contractor was reported to be in a stable condition and is likely to be air-lifted to Brisbane hospital for further treatment.**
- **Further medical inquiries are underway.**

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Date issued: 21 March 2011

BACKGROUND:

- **The Department of Defence is undertaking a project on behalf of the Australian Government to assess and destroy 144 World War II, United States-origin old chemical munitions found at the Cameby Downs mine site at Columboola, near Chinchilla, in Queensland.**
- **The assessment and destruction project is being undertaken using specialist contractors with the assistance of expert United States military technicians in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention obligations and Australian environmental, health and safety laws.**
- **Specialist advice is that in their current condition these items do not pose a risk to the public. The recovered items are in a degraded state and have been securely stored on-site, 2 kilometres from the nearest residence.**
- **The actual process of destruction will be in a chamber specifically designed to destroy chemical munitions and capture and neutralise any emissions generated in the process.**

- Defence has taken the appropriate steps to secure the munitions until destruction can take place. The site is private property and has site access control. The items themselves are very securely stored and regular security patrols are conducted.
- Specialist equipment owned [REDACTED] specifically designed for this type of work has been brought to Australia and set up on-site. [REDACTED] are in Australia to assist in the set up and operation of the destruction chamber. It will now be tested during the last week of March 2011 before the destruction work commences.
- Defence awarded the contract for the munition destruction to [REDACTED] – a company with extensive experience working in the field of Unexploded Ordnance remediation in Australia and overseas.
- Defence takes responsibility to deal with risks associated with the presence of old munitions wherever they are found. The Australian Government is obliged by international law to comply with the provisions of treaties, such as the Chemical Weapons Convention which requires that these items be destroyed.
- The community has been well informed at all stages of the process, the most recent community meetings being held on 16 and 19 March. The Queensland Government has been included in consultation and preliminary planning, including ambulance, and fire and rescue services.
- To date media interest has been low key and largely confined to the Queensland local newspapers from Chinchilla, Dalby and Toowoomba. The ABC's 7:30 Report has expressed an interest in visiting the site. There has not been any interest from other national media outlets.