

**MINISTRY OF DEFENCE & MILITARY VETERANS**

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**QUESTION FOR WRITTENREPLY**

**1971 Dr P J Groenewald (FF Plus) to ask the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans:**

(1) (a) How many tonnes of ammunition that is currently stored at 97 Ammunition Depot in De Aar have become old and less accurate, have reached the end of their shelf life-span and/or the explosives have supposedly begun to crystallise, (b) what are the calibres of the specified ammunition, (c) what number of each type of ammunition is at the depot and (d) what are the manufacturing dates of the ammunition;

(2) whether her department intends to take steps to remove the ageing ammunition; if not, why not; if so, (a) what steps and (b) how long will it take to complete the specified steps;

(3) whether the lightning conductors at the specified depot is serviced annually; If not, (a) why not and (b) what number of ammunition depots’ lightning conductors (i) have been fully serviced and/or (ii) must still be serviced this year;

(4) whether the security of the area complies with all requirements for ammunition depots; if not, why not; if so, who is responsible for the security?

**REPLY**:

(1) Most of the ammunition at the depot is old, but the ammunition is however not unstable. The life cycle of ammunition is not given in years, and it cannot be predetermined when ammunition reaches the end of life, or even when it will start to become unstable. For that reason annual inspections and functional testing are executed by the South African National Defence Force (SANDF). Various factors however influence the time span on how ammunition age and potentially become unsafe. The two worst case environments for explosives are heat and humidity, and therefore the controlled storage inside the licensed ammunition warehouses is. Annual inspections and testing are executed against specifications, designed for each type and configuration of ammunition to ensure both functioning as well as safety. Furthermore unserviceable ammunition is ammunition that is not functioning within specification, but it is still safe for storage, handling and transport. There are serviceable and unserviceable ammunition in the depot, where the backlog on disposal is on the unserviceable ammunition. There is no unstable ammunition in the depot. As soon as there is an indication from the annual testing and inspection that the possibility of ammunition become unsafe is there, these ammunition is destroyed or even sold back to the original equipment manufacturer before it could become unstable, in order to ensure that there is no safety implication from old ammunition in the depots.

At 97 Ammunition Depot there are approximately 8 000 tons (Nett Explosive Content) of unserviceable ammunition, measured in the explosive weight of the ammunition. This is primarily made up of small arms ammunition, mortar ammunition, hand and rifle grenades, aircraft bombs, artillery shells and medium calibre ammunition. The tonnage changes on a daily basis as ammunition is sold or destroyed, or as ammunition are regraded due to the inspections and dynamic testing. The phase out of weapon systems also has an influence on these tonnages.

(2) Ammunition is stored according to predetermined safety groupings in various designed for and licenced ammunition warehouses. These are designed to contain a possible explosion to those specific warehouses, and are thus traversed with a minimum safety distance to the next warehouse. The licence of each warehouse will indicate what types of ammunition can be stored there, as well as the maximum quantity of each type, in order to ensure the containment of a possible explosion. There are also an outside safety distance, taking into account all ammunition and explosives in all warehouses, to ensure the safety of personnel and infrastructure outside the depot. There is furthermore no ammunition or explosives stored in field storage, which could nullify this safety distances.

The department will carry on with the following steps to manage and reduce the ageing of ammunition. While the under mentioned steps will drastically reduce the old ammunition in the depot during the next 8 years, the ammunition will be able to be stored, handled and transported safely due to the storage conditions and annual management and prioritisation of the ammunition processes :

a. Continue with the annual inspections and dynamic testing in order to prioritise the disposal of potential unsafe ammunition.

b. Continue with the annual surveillance and chemical analyses of the propellant program, as was done for more than 10 years already, in conjunction with the industry.

c. Continue with ammunition disposal of approximately 1000 tons a year by means of sales through Armscor, which include aircraft bombs, 68mm

obsolete rockets, medium calibre ammunition and 90mm redundant ammunition, as well as conventional destruction of all other types of ammunition.

d. The conclusion of the upgrading and maintenance contract of the inert deforming facility, which was done over the past three years, followed by the already planned expansion of the facility to include explosive filled breakdown of ammunition, with the 140mm ammunition as a pilot project, over the next 4 years.

e. The rework of the mortar bombs on a new charge and tail configuration, which will upgrade the bombs from an obsolete and unserviceable condition to a serviceable condition for force preparation and force employment.

f. The placement of a destruction contract for small arms ammunition on the original equipment manufacturer is also in process as was twice done in the past.

(3) All ammunition depots and installations are to meet the requirements in terms of SANS Code of Practice 10313 of 2012, in conjunction with SANS 62305 and IEC Standards. Currently the lightning conductors are not certified. During April 2019 a process commenced to rectify these requirements. A Scope of Work and motivations were submitted to the Procurement Board, and service providers were invited on various occasions during 2020 for quotations in order to certify the lightning conductors. All three ammunition depots’ contracts have been approved for the annual service of the lightning conductors, and contractors has thus already been appointed. All funding has been put in place for these contracts, and all lightning conductors at the various depots will be certified and serviceable after the completion of this process by the contracted supplier. The Department of Defence is in the process of outsourcing the training of members in the assessment, testing, repair, maintenance and certification of the lightning conductors within the Department. The capability would thus be beneficial to the Department in the long term, as all other facilities would also be internally serviced in terms of laid down prescripts. This training should be completed in the next academic year.

(4) At the depot there is an outside perimeter fence, a three tier high security fence, guards as well as a two lock system on each of the ammunition warehouses, with all ammunition locked in warehouses. The high security fence consists of a three tier fence system, of which the middle fence is an electrical fence. The lapse of a maintenance contract entails that electricity of this fence is shut down. The three tier fence, inclusive of the gates, are however still serviceable and in working condition. Additional guards have been put in place to enhance security while the electrical fence is switched off. The maintenance of the high security fence is currently effectively executed by SANDF personnel. Once the project to upgrade the high security fences is finalised, a maintenance contract for the new fences and systems will be awarded again, as the SANDF does not have the capability to manage the electrical fence.