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PLASTIC BATON ROUNDS: DEFENSIVE Q & A

Q1. Why have further plastic baton rounds been withdrawn?

A. Investigations into the performance of baton rounds put in hand after the withdrawal from service earlier this year of all baton rounds manufactured in 1994 have revealed that the plastic plugs used in 34,000 out of the 94,000 baton rounds manufactured in 1996 have a variation in weight. The use of these rounds has been restricted to training only.

Q2. When was the problem identified?

A. The report was received at the beginning of September.

Q3. When were the faulty rounds withdrawn?

A. A restriction on the use of these rounds has been put in place with immediate effect.

Q4. What is the effect on operations?

A. The main operational users, the Armed Forces, the police forces in England and Wales and the Royal Ulster Constabulary, have adequate stocks to meet current commitments.

Q5. What effect does the fault have on the baton round?

A. A variation in weight could marginally degrade the accuracy of the rounds. No evidence exists that it would have any notable effect on the number or severity of casualties.

Q6. Will the MOD be seeking compensation from the manufacturer?

A6. Consideration of any claim will have to wait until all the facts have been established.

Q7. What steps are being taken to prevent the problem recurring?

A. 100% inspection has been re-introduced to ensure that plastic plugs used in current and future contracts conform to specification.

Q8. How many people have been injured by 1996 baton rounds?

A. We understand that over the past three years there have been some 100 injuries from all baton rounds fired by the security forces in Northern Ireland. It is possible that some of these injuries were caused by rounds with faulty plastic plugs.

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Q9. Why not withdraw all baton rounds?

A. Alternative methods of riot control have been employed but have generally proved less effective in Northern Ireland conditions. Although baton rounds are not ideal, they offer a better option than the use of live ammunition or hand-to-hand fighting.

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