

News story: Defence Secretary announces £11million boost to chemical defences

The range of measures announced by the Defence Secretary include:

- Developing plans to deploy drones and robots into potentially hazardous areas, putting personnel in less danger and identifying threats faster.
- Boosting the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory's ability to analyse substances, by investing in new technical capabilities.
- Keeping the UK at the forefront of medical advances to combat the effects of chemical agents.

The decision means the UK will remain a global leader in Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) defence. Around the world, there is evidence of these threats increasing and it is vital the UK can meet them.

Last year, the Syrian regime launched chemical attacks on its own people, which led to the UK striking several weapons facilities alongside American and French partners. At home, the UK has seen the longest chemical clean-up in living memory, in Salisbury and Amesbury.

Unmanned vehicles will conduct more testing and identification, decreasing the risk posed to humans through contact with nerve agents. This capability will be developed over the coming years.

The funding will increase the speed and accuracy with which the potential origins of substances can be analysed, helping the authorities identifying attackers faster and improving public safety.

It will also allow faster decontamination and recovery of vehicles and assets, as well as improvements to counter radiological and nuclear threats.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

After the Novichok attack in Salisbury a year ago, the nation turned to the Armed Forces and expert scientists. From the investigation to the clean-up, the military and everyone involved in the operation have worked tirelessly to decontaminate the streets of Salisbury.

Britain and its allies have also demonstrated that they will take a stand against the use of chemical weapons, from the sanctions enforced on Russia following the reckless use of Novichok to the strikes against the chemicals used by Syrian regime.

We recognise we need resilience to face evolving threats which is why we have invested £11million into ensuring we have a world-leading capability.

Standing Joint Commander (UK) Lieutenant General Tyrone Urch said

The decontamination work in Salisbury and Amesbury over the last 12 months has been a complex and daunting challenge for the Armed Forces.

All of the personnel involved demonstrated adaptability, professionalism, resilience and courage; they have been absolutely first-class and lived up to their world-leading reputation. This investment will allow us to further improve our expertise and, most importantly, keep the public safe.

This funding will be available in the new financial year and invested straight into programmes that will benefit DSTL scientists and the Armed Forces. It is in addition to the £48million announced by the Defence Secretary last year to develop a new Chemical Weapons Defence Centre.