

Zyklon B

Highly poisonous gas used for extermination in the Euthanasia Program and later in the Gas Chambers of the Nazi Extermination Camps, particularly Auschwitz. Zyklon B is the commercial name of hydrogen cyanide (HCN).

Originally, the Germans used carbon monoxide in gas vans and in sealed rooms, such as at Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka. The Nazis realized, however, that carbon monoxide gassing was not efficient for the large-scale killing they were planning for Auschwitz. Adolf Eichmann then went in search of a different poisonous gas that would be more appropriate. On September 3, 1941 the Nazis experimented on a group of Russian prisoners of war; they wanted to see whether Zyklon B, used in the camps for fumigation purposes, was an effective means of mass murder. The experiment was successful. From then on, Zyklon B was used in Birkenau (Auschwitz II) for the mass gassing of Jews brought there from all over Europe.

Zyklon B was delivered to the camps in crystal pellet form. As soon as the pellets were exposed to air they turned into poisonous gas. A Nazi equipped with a gas mask would empty the crystals into the packed gas chamber through a small opening. Within minutes, the victims were dead.