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Forces of the Islamic State (also known as ISIS) launched at least three chemical attacks on the [Iraqi](#) town of Qayyarah. The use of toxic chemicals as a means of warfare is a serious threat to civilians and combatants in and around the embattled city of Mosul and is a war crime.

The attacks hit the town of Qayyarah, 60 kilometers south of Mosul, in September and October after Iraqi government forces retook the town on August 25, 2016. The attacks caused painful burns to at least seven people consistent with exposure to low levels of a chemical warfare agent known as "vesicants," or blister agents, a chemical weapons expert told Human Rights Watch.

Iraq: ISIS Uses Chemical Weapons



Police and residents of Qayyarah remove a projectile containing toxic chemicals, without any protective equipment, from the garden of a family home in the town of Qayyarah on September 21, 2016.

"ISIS attacks using toxic chemicals show a brutal disregard for human life and the laws of war," said [Lama Fakih](#), deputy Middle East director. "As ISIS fighters flee, they have been repeatedly attacking and endangering the civilians they left behind, increasing concerns for residents of Mosul and other contested areas."

Iraqi and Kurdistan Regional Government forces, supported by a United States-led coalition, have been moving up the Tigris River, retaking towns and villages from ISIS. The Qayyarah attacks preceded the military operations that began on October 17 to retake Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city.

At the time of the attacks, ISIS forces were holding positions between three and six kilometers north of the town. Fifteen Qayyarah residents told Human Rights Watch on October 31 that these were the first attacks of their kind in the area. They, as well as a staff member at the US embassy in Baghdad, said ISIS carried out the attacks. The residents based this on the fact that Iraqi forces were fully in control of the town of Qayyarah at the time, with ISIS carrying out attacks on the city, targeting military positions. They believed that ISIS was trying to force the town's population to flee toward them, based on reports that ISIS had tried to compel civilians to retreat with them in other areas, then target opposing forces entering the area. Human Rights Watch could not confirm this allegation.

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