Chemical Weapons in the First World War

The first large scale use of chemical weapons was during World War I.

USAGE: primarily used to demoralize, injure, and kill entrenched defenders
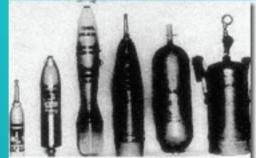

The types of weapons:

- Disabling chemicals, such as tear gas-Tear gas was the first chemical weapon to be used by French in WW1 on August 14th, 1911, then by Germans against the British. Phosgene, chlorine, and mustard gas to to lethal agents.

- Mustard gas was the most widely used, and possibly the most effective, chemical weapon in WW1. It was first used in Germany, in July of 1917

- Phosgene gas- first synthesized in 1812 by Sir Humphry Davy, it was more potent and deadlier than Chlorine gas, it was initially used by the Germans, over the course of the War both the Allies and the Axis used it.

- Chlorine gas was a killing agent first employed by the Germans, it appeared as a slow-moving yellow green cloud. It was a pulmonary irritant, and acutely affected the upper and lower respiratory tracts.

The effect of mustard gas

From left to right: mustard shell, white phosphorus shell, mustard bomb, mustard shell, the Livens phosgene projectile and portable chemical cylinder. Photograph by Chemical and Biological Defense Command Historical Research

Chemical weapons were a major component of the first global war and first total war of the 20th century.
The killing capacity of gas was limited, with only about 90 thousand fatalities from a total of some 1.2 million casualties caused by gas attacks.

The day the first poison gas attack changed the face of warfare forever
On 22 April 1915, less than nine months into the First World War, the German army unleashed a terrifying new weapon across a 6km front, troops released almost 168 tonnes of poisonous chlorine gas towards trenches held by French and Algerian forces near the Belgian city of Ypres.