

## ***Ordnance and explosives cleanup***

### **Charting a new course of action**

Archive searches, interviews, and ordnance investigations have identified a number of suspected sites resulting from the use of ordnance and explosives (OE) during Army combat training on the former Fort Ord. Ordnance and explosives training activities occurred primarily within the Multi Range Area (MRA), which comprises approximately 8,000 acres in the southwest portion of the base. Potential ordnance training sites have also been identified outside the MRA. Ordnance and explosives may also be present on those sites.

The Fort Ord OE program currently consists of the implementation of two main cleanup processes: (1) Removal Actions and (2) OE Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study (OE RI/FS) with the main goal of protecting public safety by rendering OE sites as safe as possible from explosive hazards with a minimum of risk to all.

As a result of the recent Federal court decision, the Army must complete a Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study - an extensive evaluation of alternatives - and sign a Record of Decision before it can proceed with vegetation clearance involving prescribed burning. In 1999, the Army began a Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study that will cover the ordnance and explosives cleanup program for the entire base. But this study will not be complete until 2005 at the earliest.

The Army has identified a course of action that will speed up the process as much as possible in order to protect the public, while still complying with all the laws and environmental regulations. This plan of action includes the following:

- Rather than halt the cleanup until the basewide OE RI/FS is completed, the Army has decided to prepare an Interim Action Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study. By focusing this study on just those areas that are the highest priority for cleanup rather than the entire base, the Army hopes to complete the study early in 2002, with a decision mid-2002. Because of the work that has already been going on as part of the larger basewide Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study, many of the studies that are needed to make a

decision about these specific areas are not only underway but nearing completion. Meanwhile the Army will continue with the longer-term study.

- Surface clearance of unexploded ordnance (UXO) of Ranges 43-48 in the MRA began on August 29. This work is to remove hazardous explosives inside the fenced and posted danger area that are visible on the surface and possibly attractive to members of the public. Unexploded ordnance found during the clearance was detonated on site. The work was completed in September.
- Ordnance and explosives cleanup during 2001 has been limited to surface clearance of high risk range areas and support of the improvement of more than 50 miles of firebreaks within the MRA.

The Army held a symposium on September 19 to present the reasons for clearing the brush from some areas of the former base. The Army believes that the hazard of unexploded ordnance on several sites within the MRA presents a safety hazard to the community. At the symposium, the Army described how without first clearing the brush that hides the unexploded ordnance, the workers with the job of removing it will be placed at an unacceptable risk. A decision on three areas where UXO is known to exist on the surface and where frequent trespass is a problem will be made soon.

Because the smoke from brush burning on the former base can drift off the property and affect local communities, the agencies that make up the BRAC Cleanup Team (BCT): the USEPA, California Department of Toxic Substances Control, will determine if it will be used. Other agencies and bureaus also contributed an opinion about the propriety of burning vegetation to support the UXO cleanup on the former Fort Ord.

### Site Security

Since 1994, the Army has been conducting an ordnance and explosives (OE) removal program to remove explosive risks in OE areas. Removal actions have not only reduced immediate explosive risks but have provided information about the types of unexploded ordnance and level of explosive risk at each of the sites for use in the OE RI/FS, which will identify long-term remedies.

The Army began an Ordnance and Explosives Site Security Program to inform the public and identify security measures that will work best to restrict public access to OE sites. Preventive measures like the distribution of safety brochures and safety presentations to local schools and groups as well as the fences, barricades and warning signs that are in place around OE sites are the responsibility of the Army, until the areas are considered safe.

The cleanup of ordnance and explosives on the former Fort Ord is a long-term project. The cleanup of ordnance and explosives is projected to occur over the next 12 – 15 years. The need to keep ordnance and explosives sites secure will be equally as long.