

FORT ORD PRESCRIBED BURN FACT SHEET

HAS FORT ORD HAD FIRES IN THE PAST?

- During the years Fort Ord was used as an Army training facility (1917-1993), there were frequent accidental fires caused by munitions training and prescribed burns conducted by the Army to reduce vegetation fuel load.
- The last prescribed burn was in 1998. The Army halted prescribed burns from 1998 to 2003 to resolve a lawsuit and develop a new burn prescription to minimize smoke impacts. There was an accidental fire in 1999, and again in 2003.

WHY DOES FORT ORD USE PRESCRIBED BURNS?



- A large area in the southern part of Fort Ord was used to train soldiers firing artillery, rockets, and grenades. A percentage of this ordnance and explosives never exploded, and could be triggered if disturbed in any way. The land cannot be used until these materials are removed.
- Occasionally trespassers, including children, go on the land despite warning signs and a razor-wire fence. Anyone who enters the land is in extreme danger. During the time Fort Ord was an open installation, access to the Multi-Range Area (MRA) was not as restricted as it is today, and there are six

known accidents at Fort Ord involving ordnance and explosives since the 1940's.

- This land is covered with dense vegetation (chaparral). Workers can't see the ground under the vegetation, so it is not safe for them to do cleanup work until the vegetation is removed.
- The vegetation cannot be removed by hand or machine because that too could trigger the explosives, endangering workers. Prescribed burns are the only safe way to clear the vegetation.

WHO MADE THE DECISION TO USE PRESCRIBED BURNS?

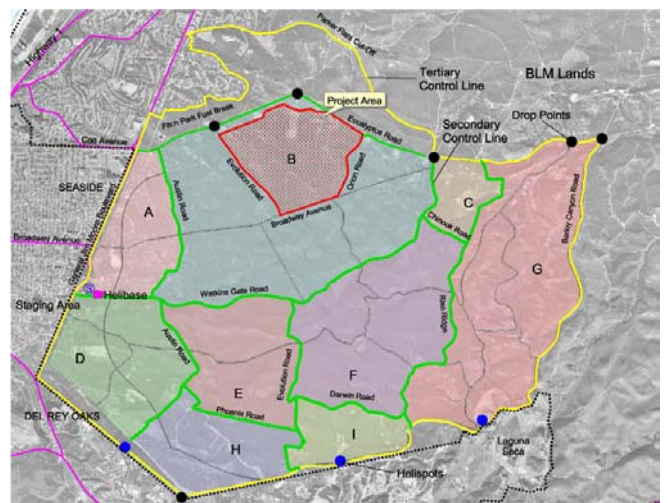
- The Army made the decision after an extensive study of all alternatives. The decision was co-signed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the California Department of Toxic Substances Control. The Army also consulted with the California Air Resources Board in developing its "prescription" for weather conditions under which a fire could be lit and would have minimum smoke impacts.

WHAT ABOUT PROTECTING THE HABITAT?

- The chaparral habitat is actually rejuvenated by fire (and does not grow back well if cut by hand). In fact, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the federal agency that protects endangered species, requires the Army to use prescribed burns to protect the habitat.
- Many of the animals are able to flee the fire, but some are killed. On the other hand, wildlife biologists say that the number and diversity of animals will increase considerably in the rejuvenated habitat.

WHAT WAS DONE TO MANAGE THE FIRE?

- Because of the amount of explosive material on the ground, it is dangerous for firemen to be on the ground near the fire. So the fire must be controlled from the air using helicopters and air tankers.
- The Army set up three lines of containment (see map), one around the area to be burned, one around the larger multi-range training area, and at roads around Fort Ord. Containment lines consist of areas of cut vegetation and/or paved roads. The primary containment lines were pre-treated with foam and fire retardant prior to the prescribed burn.



CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

- 1997** – Army conducts a prescribed burn to support unexploded ordnance cleanup. The planned 125-acre burn escaped, burning about 750 acres.
- 1998** – Army conducts four prescribed burns. All fires are contained but local air district sues the Army over smoke impacts caused by the burns.
- 1999** - Wildfire occurs near South Boundary Road as the result of a detonation to destroy ordnance recovered during a cleanup.
- 2001** – Courts say Army has jurisdiction over fires, and Army begins study of alternatives for vegetation clearance.
- Aug. 2002** – Army concludes analysis of alternatives and the Army, in consultation with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and California Department of Toxic Substances Control, concludes that prescribed burns are the only safe method of vegetation removal.
- As part of this study, a “weather conditions prescription” is developed, in consultation with the California Air Resources Board and Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District.
 - A fire management plan is also developed describing how the fire will be managed.
- Nov. 2002** – The Army’s meteorologists predict appropriate weather conditions and the Army announces it plans to conduct a prescribed burn for Nov. 19. Several hundred people voluntarily relocate out of the area at the Army’s expense. But weather conditions change the night before the fire, and the fire is postponed.
- July 2003** - Wildfire starts as a result of Navy Seals training exercise at the MOUT facility. The Eucalyptus Fire burns for several days and consumes about 700 acres.
- July 2003** – The Army sends a community bulletin to more than 50,000 Monterey area residents announcing the beginning of “burn season” and informing people about the option of relocating during the fire.
- Sept. 2003** – The Army places large advertisements in Monterey and Salinas newspapers announcing prescribed burn and offering voluntary relocation.
- Oct. 10, 2003** – The Army announces it plans a prescribed burn for Oct. 13, but weather conditions change and the Army postpones the fire once again.
- Oct. 21, 2003** – The Army schedules a prescribed burn for Oct 24. Announcements go out to media, and there are front-page stories in local newspapers.
- Oct. 23, 2003** – People who decide to relocate begin to leave the area. Consultation with agencies determines that appropriate weather conditions exist and fire management plan in place. Army increases the number of fire crews, knowing that some local fire crews could be called to southern California fires.
- Oct. 24, 2003** –
- 6 AM: Media interviews describing the morning weather conditions to be within prescription.
- 8:56 AM: The Army lights a test fire to verify site conditions and proceeds with the prescribed burn on Ranges 43-48.
- 9:17 AM: First calls complaining about smoke and falling ashes come from Seaside and Monterey. 13 calls are logged during the first hour. 81 complaints are logged throughout the day.
- 10 AM: Media field trip to an overlook point.
- 10 AM: The fire escapes the 1st line of containment. The Army stops igniting the fire on Ranges 43-48 and puts all fire crews and equipment to work on containing the escaped fire inside the 2nd line of containment. Ultimately the fire burns 980 acres beyond the area planned.
- 12 PM: Press briefing. Escape is reported but few details are available. More details are made available to media at 3 PM.
- Early evening: Army holds fire within secondary containment. Media briefing at 6 PM.
- 9 PM: Flare-up of flames occurs inside the containment lines near Gen. Jim Moore Blvd. Flames are clearly visible from homes near the road. Seaside Fire Dept. waters down some back yards.
- 10 PM: Fire is 100% contained within the secondary line. Media interviews are conducted.
- Oct. 25, 2003:** Army ignites small area of vegetation inside containment lines, to decrease chance that a flare-up occur, about 12 PM. Three complaints are received. The relocation period is extended one day.
- Oct. 26, 2003:** Army ignites additional small areas inside containment lines for fire control purposes. Relocation period is extended an additional day. Three complaints are received. Pictures show much more ordnance and explosives on ground in escaped fire area than expected.
- Oct. 27, 2003:** Army ignites additional small areas of unburned vegetation inside containment lines for fire control purposes.
- Oct. 28, 2003:** Mop-up operation continues. Relocation period ends at 12 PM.
- Oct. 31, 2003:** Mop-up operation concludes.

