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ARMY ANNOUNCES PRESCRIBED BURN THIS FALL

Voluntary Relocation Program Available

The Army announced today it will begin cleaning up several former artillery-training ranges at the former Fort Ord. The first step, a prescribed burn at Ranges 43-48, is planned to occur sometime this fall, possibly in October.

The Army will burn off heavy brush so cleanup workers can enter safely and see the ground to avoid stepping on and triggering explosive materials. They must remove the unexploded ordnance left from earlier training at Fort Ord before someone is injured or killed.

The decision to conduct the burn came after a lengthy study in consultation with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the California Department of Toxic Substances Control. The Army and the Environmental Protection Agency just signed a Record of Decision describing the decision and the reasons for the decision.

The Army has informed the community about the alternatives considered through three community bulletins, each mailed to more than 50,000 households. Two community symposia were held to inform the community, as well as two public comment meetings and a community involvement workshop on the burns.

Fires regularly occurred at Fort Ord prior to 1998. People living here then who had no health problems are not likely to have problems now, unless their health has changed.

Linda Velasquez, M.D., acting Monterey County Public Health Officer says: “Breathing lots of smoke isn’t good for you, but how harmful it is depends on how much you breathe and your own state of health. The amount of smoke that results from a properly conducted prescribed burn should not pose a health risk to healthy people. If there is any discomfort, it should be temporary and minimal, like the effects of sitting around a campfire. But people with existing breathing conditions, such as asthma or emphysema, may want to take reasonable precautions like staying indoors or might consider relocating during the fire.”

The Army will only start the burn on a day when weather conditions allow smoke to rise quickly and blow away at high altitudes. Fire management experts expect little smoke will reach Fort Ord's neighbors. If things don't go as planned, however, smoke is most likely to reach Fort Ord's neighbors to the east or southeast.

Some community residents have expressed concerns that prescribed burns could trigger pollutants from unexploded ordnance and explosives. The Army, working with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the California Department of Toxic Substances Control, conducted a study of the pollutants released into the air from incidental detonation of ordnance or explosives during

a fire. The agencies' experts concluded that the amounts were so small a fire on Fort Ord land is basically no different from a fire on land with similar vegetation containing no explosives.

VOLUNTARY RELOCATION PLAN ANNOUNCED

The Army announced it would pay temporary relocation costs -- meals, lodging and transportation -- for Monterey County residents wanting to leave the area during the prescribed burn. The fire should last only one day, but the Army will provide three nights' lodging to be sure smoke clears from the air. Those interested should phone (831) 242-7383 or 1-800-852-9699 to get an information packet and application for relocation. Applicants completing the forms before the prescribed burn is announced can expect no delays. Those wanting notification about the burn, but who do not intend to relocate, can also call the number above.

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