

Draft Final  
**AFTER-ACTION REPORT:  
FORT ORD 2003 VOLUNTARY  
RELOCATION PROGRAM**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>THE 2002 VOLUNTARY RELOCATION PROGRAM</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>EVALUATION OF THE 2002 RELOCATION PROGRAM</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>POLICY CHANGES MADE IN 2003 RELOCATION PROGRAM</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>CHRONOLOGY OF 2003 RELOCATION PROGRAM ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>CURRENTLY PLANNED COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>TOTALS FOR RELOCATION PROGRAM ENROLLMENT</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>RELOCATION PROGRAM COSTS</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>COMMENTS FROM STAFF</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>COMMENTS RECEIVED FROM THE PUBLIC</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>CHANGES NEEDED IN THE RELOCATION PROGRAM</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Public Comments and Responses</b>	<b>35</b>

## **AFTER-ACTION REPORT FORT ORD 2003 VOLUNTARY RELOCATION PROGRAM**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In September 2002, the US Army, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the California Department of Toxic Substance Control signed the Interim Action Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study (IA RI/FS) Record of Decision. In this document the agencies concluded that prescribed burns would be used to remove vegetation on Ranges 43-48, Range 30A and OE-16 at the former Fort Ord. As part of this decision, the agencies decided to offer Monterey County residents temporary relocation during prescribed burns, on a voluntary basis. This part of the decision was documented in the 2002 Voluntary Relocation Plan which was one of the supporting documents for the Record of Decision. This plan described how the relocation would work and the community outreach program that would precede any prescribed burn.

During Nov 2002, the Army announced a prescribed burn and announced that the relocation would begin on Nov. 18, 2002. On the evening of Nov. 18, after many people had already relocated, the Army concluded that weather conditions had changed sufficiently that they would not proceed with the prescribed burn. People who had relocated were notified to return home and were reimbursed for their expenses for the time they were away.

On October 10, 2003, the Army announced that the postponed prescribed burn was scheduled for October 13, 2003. However, on October 11, the fire was postponed once again, this time before people had the opportunity to relocate.

On October 21, 2004, the Army announced that the prescribed burn had been rescheduled for October 24. Many families relocated on October 23, and the prescribed burn did occur on October 24. However, the prescribed burn escaped the primary lines of containment and burned nearly 1,500 acres, approximately 1,000 acres more than the intended 500 acres. This required additional follow-up burns and mopping-up operations. As a result, the relocation which was originally planned for three nights away was extended by two more nights.

This report describes changes made to the relocation program based on the experience of the 2002 relocation, and then describes the events that occurred during the 2003 relocation program.

### **THE 2002 VOLUNTARY RELOCATION PROGRAM**

During the fall months of 2002, the Army accepted applications for voluntary relocation. Participants in the relocation program had the choice of making their own arrangements for meals and lodging then applying for reimbursement up to

the federal limits, or staying in hotel assigned by the Army and receiving meal vouchers to cover their meals.

The Army scheduled a prescribed burn on Ranges 43-48 for Nov. 19, 2002. Those individuals and families who had applied for voluntary relocation were notified that they should relocate on Nov. 18, 2002.

205 individuals and families relocated on Nov. 18, 2002. This was only 43% of the applicants, but it is likely that more would have relocated if the fire had actually occurred. However, late on Nov. 18<sup>th</sup> the Army concluded that weather conditions were no longer appropriate for a prescribed burn, and people who had relocated were told on return home on Nov. 19, 2002.

A total of 482 people applied for the relocation program, with nearly 150 people completing applications on Nov. 18, 2002. 154 people selected the pre-paid hotel option on their application, and 328 chose the reimbursement option.

Of the people who actually relocated on Nov. 18<sup>th</sup>, 80 families (the applicant plus spouse or dependents) stayed in pre-paid motels while 125 families stayed in hotels or motels of their own choosing and received reimbursement. The cost of meals, lodging and transportation for this relocation was less than \$50,000. The cost would have been higher had the burn not been cancelled.

Immediately following the end of the voluntary relocation, the Army mailed a reimbursement package to all people who had applied for relocation. This package included: (1) a cover letter, (2) a reimbursement request form, (3) instructions for completing the reimbursement form, and (4) a pre-paid return envelope addressed to the Army Corps of Engineers in Sacramento.

Several weeks later the Army sent a questionnaire to all people who applied for relocation. The questionnaire concentrated on their reasons for relocating, their experience during the relocation, and suggestions for improving the relocation program.

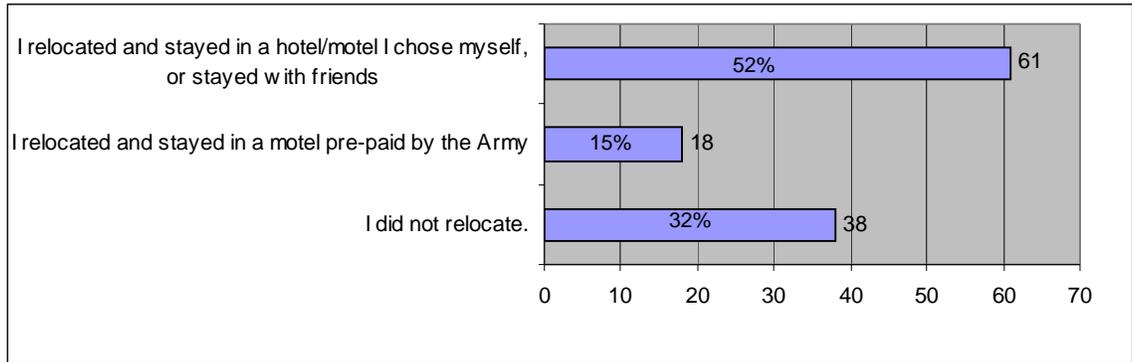
## **EVALUATION OF THE 2002 RELOCATION PROGRAM**

Following the 2002 relocation the Army conducted an evaluation of the 2002 program. This evaluation was in two parts: (1) a questionnaire sent to all people who applied for relocation, and (2) meetings with all staff who had participated in the relocation and reimbursement process to identify issues and problems.

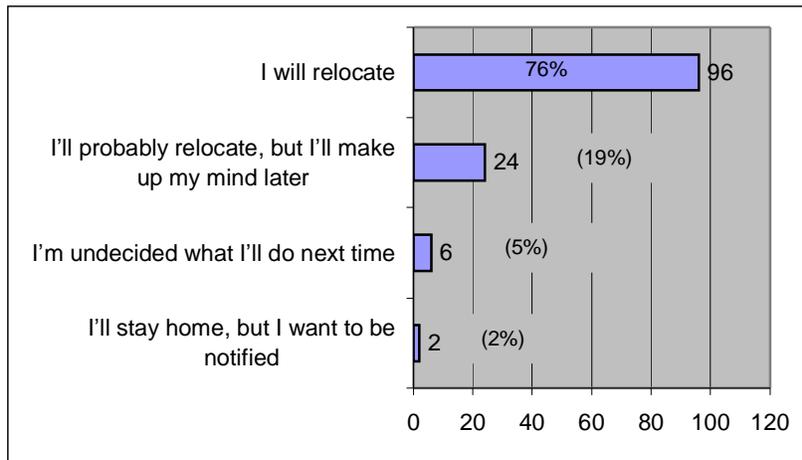
### Results from the Questionnaire:

126 evaluation forms were returned to the Army by March 1, 2003. The results from the questionnaire are summarized below:

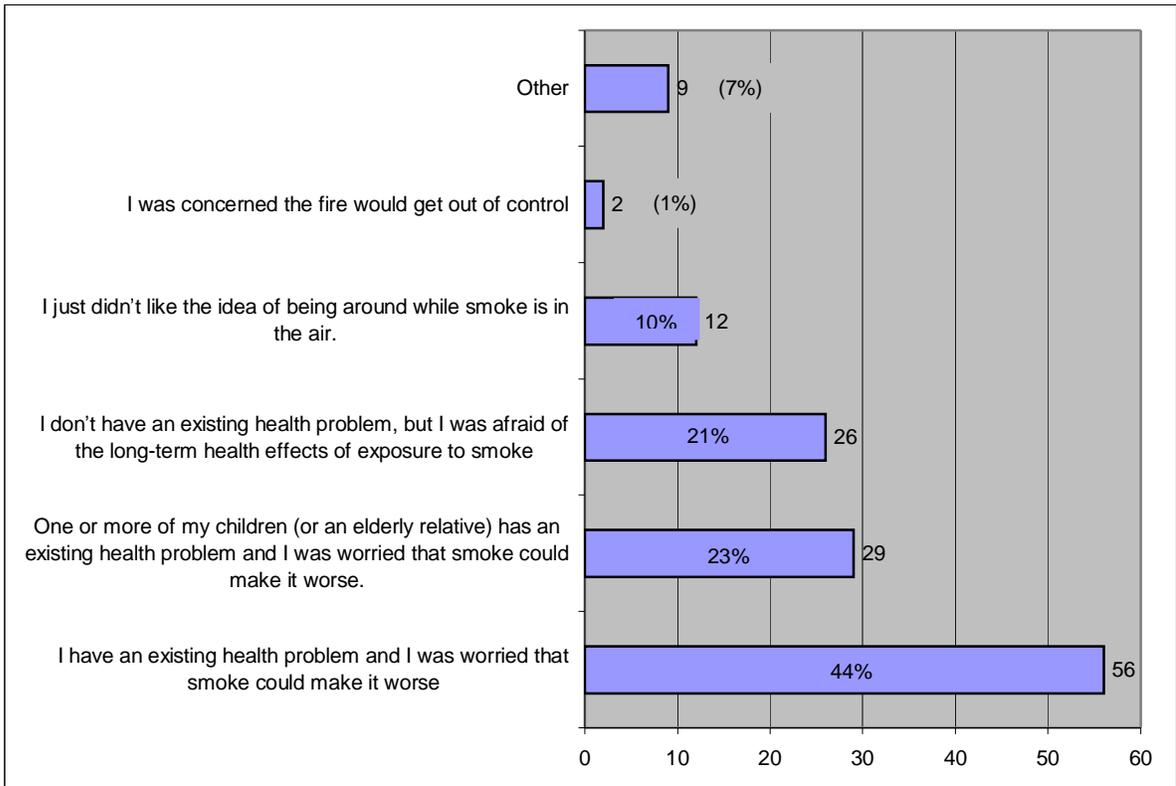
*What did you do during the recent relocation?*



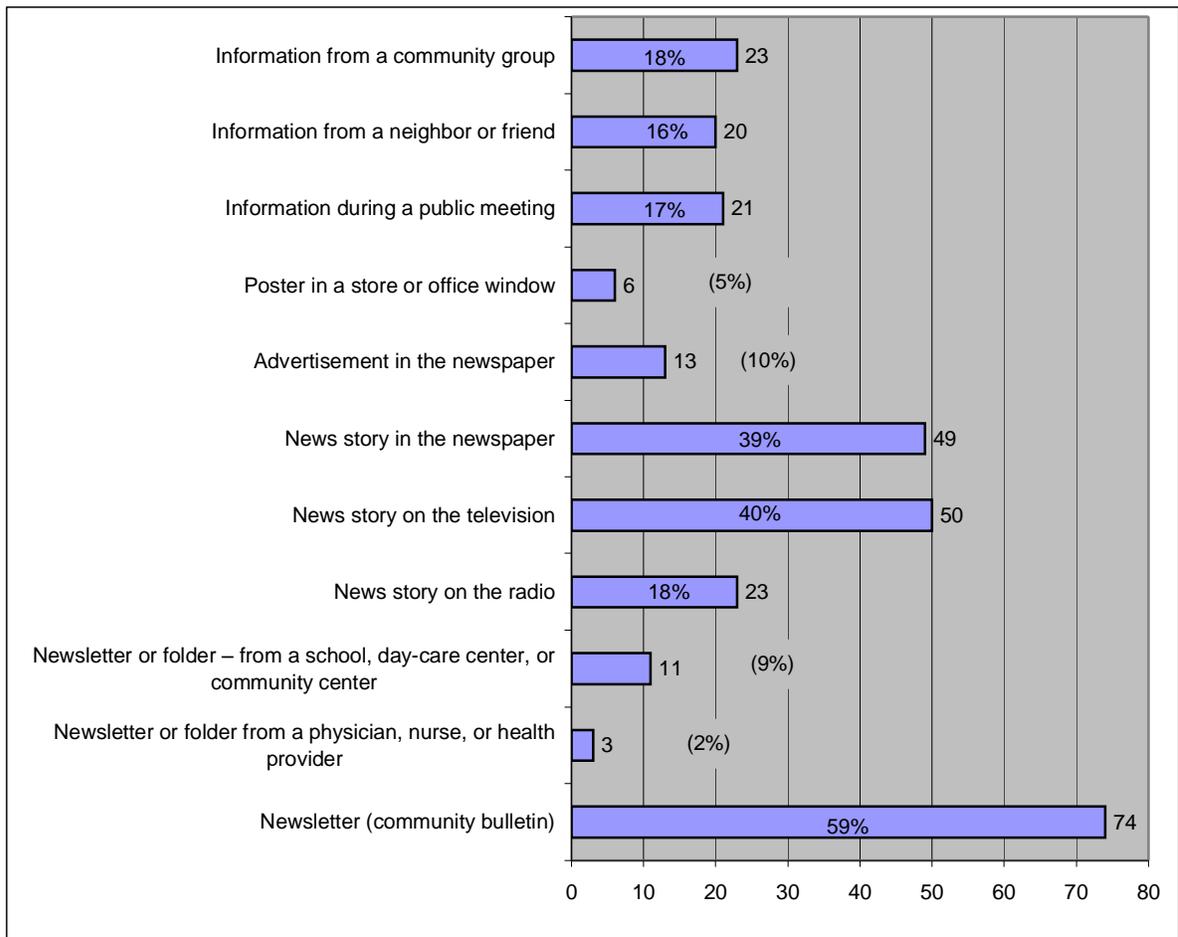
*What do you plan to do when the Army announces that there will be a prescribed burn?*



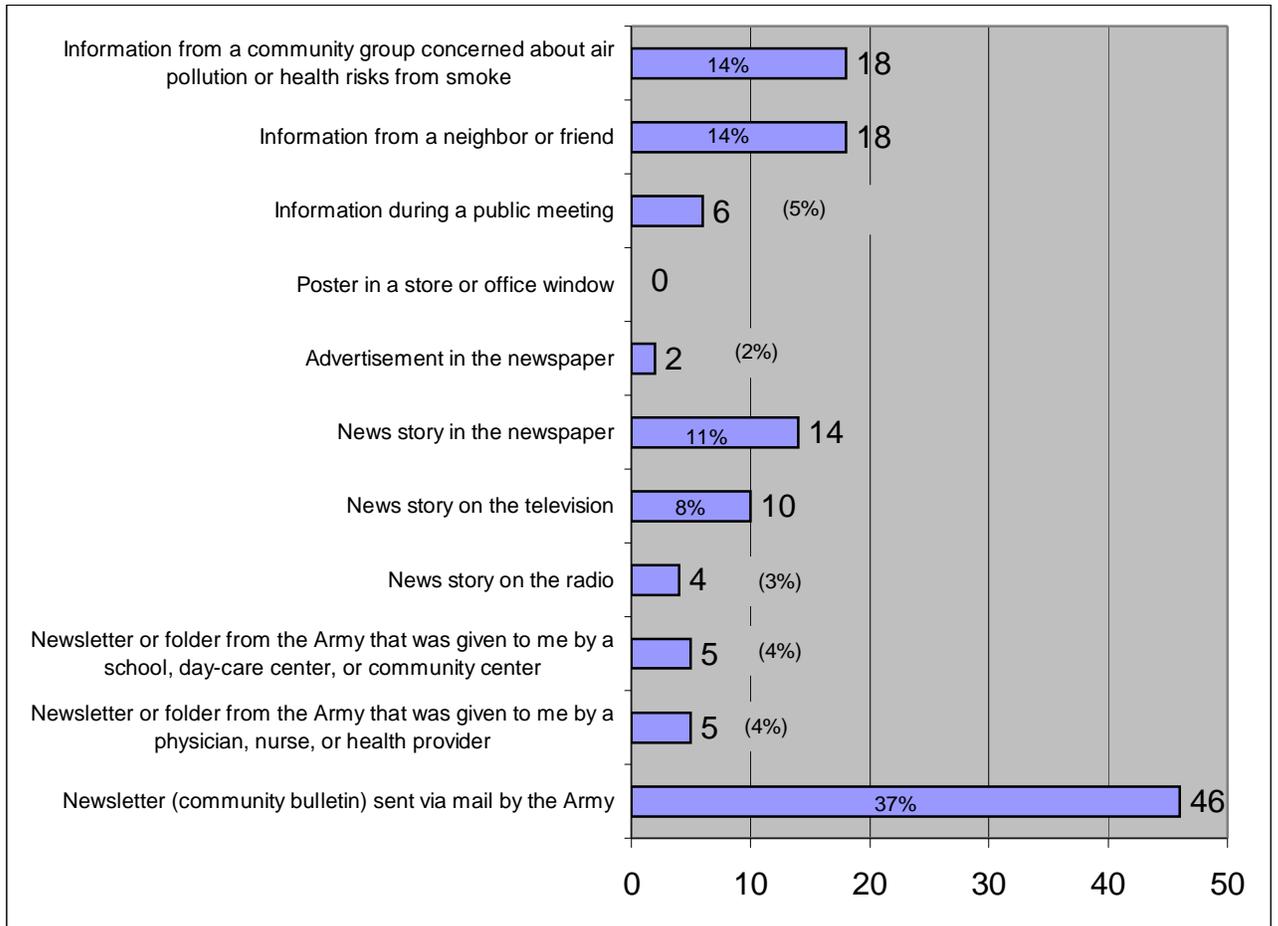
*Why did you choose to relocate?*



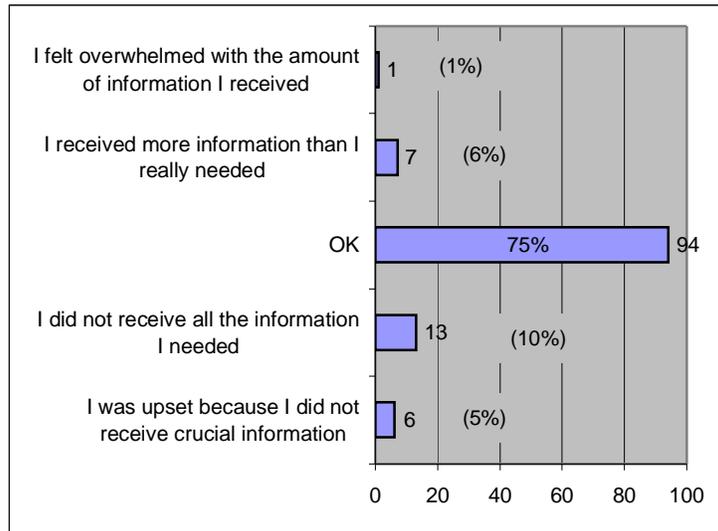
*All of the information sources you saw or read before the relocation?*



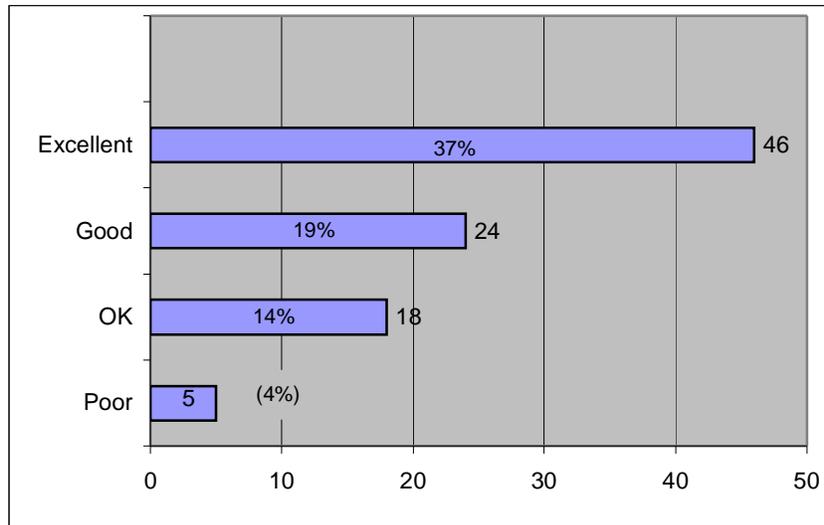
The one information source that was the most important in helping you decide to relocate?



*Your reaction to the amount of information you received before the relocation.*



*How you were treated by the Army staff that helped you sign up or notified you that relocation was occurring*



Respondents were also asked to submit written comments about problems that occurred during relocation. The most frequent complaints were that people had not received their reimbursement in a timely manner,<sup>1</sup> people were inconvenienced by receiving late notification about the motel to which they had been assigned (pre-paid motels), and people

<sup>1</sup> The envelopes mailed with the reimbursement form did not have the correct zip code. As a result, the Post Office held nearly 200 envelopes for more than a month before delivering them to the people processing reimbursements.

made reservations at a hotel with a 24 or 48 hour cancellation policy and had to pay an extra night of lodging.<sup>2</sup>

### Staff Evaluation

Staff who were involved in conducting the relocation or reimbursement identified the following issues:

- The relocation office was flooded with nearly 150 people enrolling the day of relocation, and while these numbers were handled, it was with considerable difficulty and stress
- Because the decision to proceed with a prescribed burn occurred over a weekend, the Army Corps of Engineers had difficulty mobilizing people with the requisite authority to make contractual commitments on lodging and vouchers until the day before the burn. As a result, some people did not receive information about their motel assignment until very late the afternoon they were to relocate. This accounted for the vast majority of calls received on the relocation hotline.
- There was no direct telephonic communication between the staff answering the hotline and staff handling hotel room assignments, so hotline operators were unable to answer questions about hotel assignments.
- People answering the hotline did not have access to the computer database so they were unable to get information about hotel assignments from the database
- Procedures about where people were to get their food vouchers were not clear.
- There was some evidence of abuse of the program (e.g. Coast Weekly article referenced student parties at a local hotel and Big Sur at Government expense).
- Some applicants did not provide valid identification or proof of Monterey County residency (e.g. expired driver's licenses, P.O. Boxes).
- Meteorologists informed the Army that the policy of providing 7 days of notice was unrealistic since their ability to predict weather conditions even at three days was problematic.
- Many people were relocated just a few miles to hotels in Marina. A significant wind shift could have sent the smoke to Marina.
- Because of the influx of new applicants on the day of relocation, it was extremely difficult to arrange for pre-paid hotels. This resulted in many more people being relocated to Marina than had been planned.

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<sup>2</sup> People who had to pay for an extra night's lodging were told to submit their receipts and explain the circumstances for consideration by the people preparing reimbursement. The Army then reimbursed people for the extra night of lodging.

## **POLICY CHANGES MADE IN 2003 RELOCATION PROGRAM**

Based on this evaluation, the following changes were made in the 2003 Relocation Program.

### Exclusion Zone:

The agencies established an exclusion zone to include any areas where wind shifts could bring smoke. Ultimately the decision was made to exclude all of Monterey County. All pre-paid hotels would be located outside this area, and the Army would not reimburse people for relocation to a hotel or residence of their own choosing within Monterey County.

### Three-day Notification Period

The public was notified that three days was the maximum notice that would be given, and the public was informed that even at three days there would still be uncertainty about whether the prescribed burn would actually occur.

### Enrollment Period for Pre-Paid Rooms

The public was informed that the Army would provide pre-paid rooms only to people who applied for relocation at least 48 hours before an announced prescribed burn. This would give the Army 48 hours to arrange rooms, notify people of their room assignments, etc.

### Food Vouchers Pick-Up

The Army developed a delivery system for vouchers so that people would receive their food vouchers after they relocated to their assigned pre-paid motel.

### Fixed Room Assignments

Applicants for pre-paid rooms were notified in advance of the type of motel that would be provided (e.g. Motel 6, Holiday Inn Express), and were informed that if they did not wish to stay in the assigned motel they would need to notify the Army and switch to the reimbursement plan.

### Internal Coordination

The Army would make arrangements so that people handling the hotline and people handling room assignments and vouchers would be located in the same building during the 24 hours prior to the burn, and would all

share access to the database. Sufficient equipment would be obtained to handle any last minute influx of phone calls or applicants.

### Update Letter

The Army would send a letter to all prior applicants informing them of the changes that were being made in the program. If they wished to continue to relocate they needed to complete and mail an acknowledgement form. The acknowledgement form would also be used to update any information, such as a change of address, etc., and people would be asked to sign an acknowledgment that they understood the changes in the relocation program (which will be spelled out on the acknowledgement page). This acknowledgment form would also ask people to acknowledge that by continuing in the program they are giving permission to the Army to retain their personal information in the database. The update letter would also include an announcement that if the letter was not returned by an established deadline, people would be removed from the database. If they decided subsequently that they want to relocate, they would have to re-apply.

### Revised Voluntary Relocation Plan

The Army would revise the 2002 Voluntary Relocation Plan to reflect these changes and update publicity materials.

## **CHRONOLOGY OF 2003 RELOCATION PROGRAM ACTIVITIES**

### January

- Meetings were held with the Base Cleanup Team (BCT) to evaluate the relocation program and determine the changes needed in the program.
- A community relations plan was developed describing the activities needed to inform the public about the relocation program.
- A briefing on the status of the relocation program was conducted as part of the monthly Community Involvement Workshop.
- Work began on Community Bulletin #5.

### February

- Revisions made to Community Bulletin #5.
- Relocation booth set up and staffed at former Fort Ord Open House event – attendance of 92 people at Open House.

## March

- Community Bulletin #5 goes to final layout.
- Work began on Community Bulletin #6.
- A briefing on the status of the relocation program was conducted as part of the monthly Community Involvement Workshop.

## April

- Draft guidance for hotline operators drafted.
- Report prepared summarizing the responses on questionnaires distributed to participants in the 2002 relocation program.

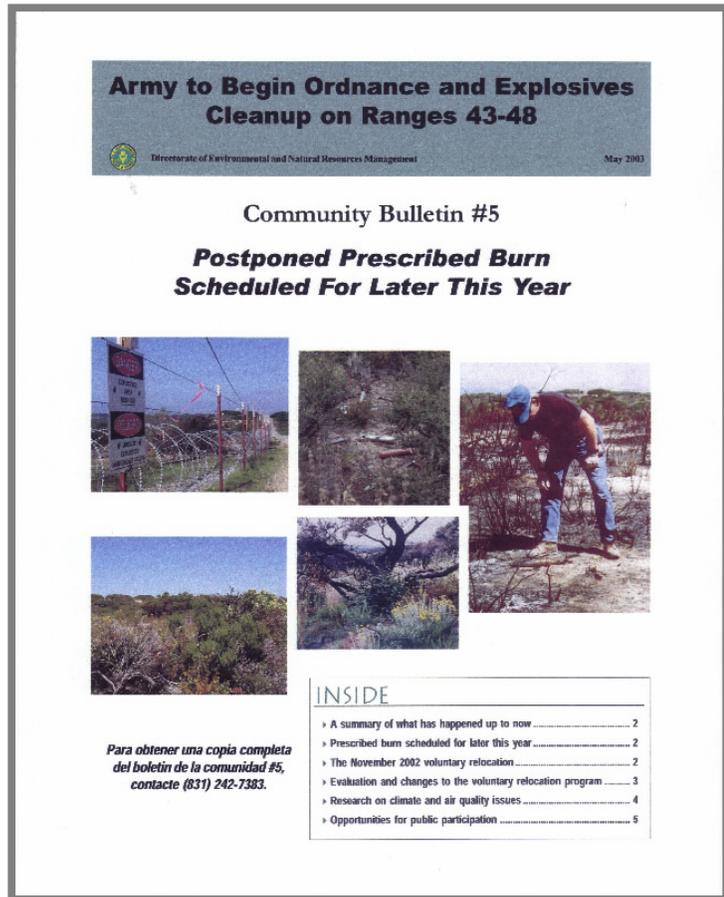
- The relocation program was a major agenda item at the monthly Community Involvement Workshop and the quarterly Technical Review Committee meeting.

## May

- Community Bulletin #5 mailed to 50,000 Monterey County homes.
- Revised Voluntary Relocation Plan prepared, including revised publicity materials, press release, etc.
- Planning begins with the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) and California State University Monterey Bay (CSUMB) Environmental Sciences Department for a for CSUMB student symposium.
- Developed a relocation program tasks & schedule matrix.

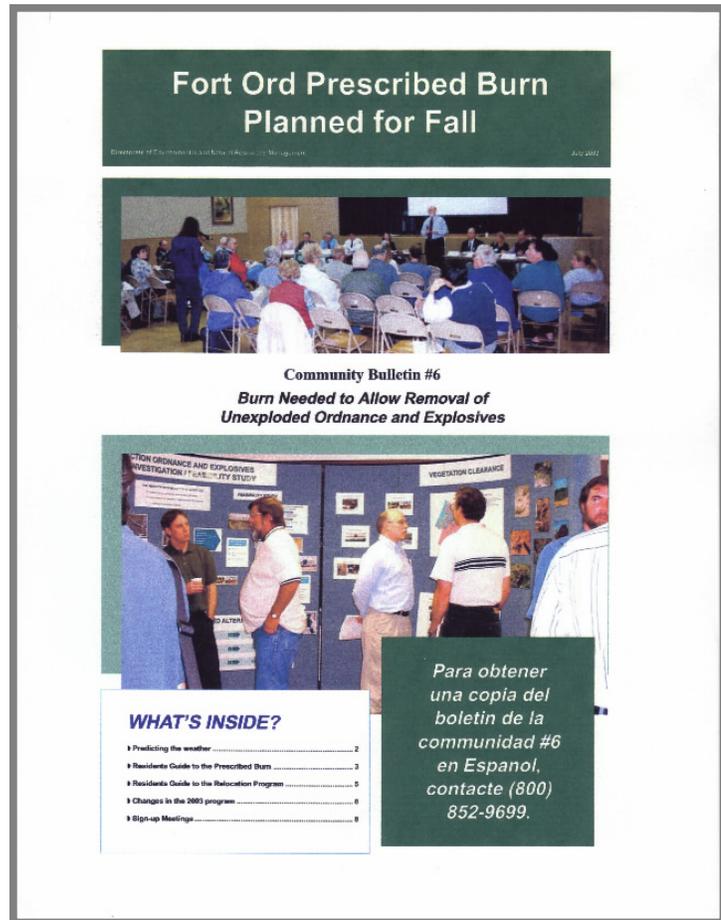
## June

- Coordination with Army Corps of Engineers staff regarding database and relocation/reimbursement procedures.
- Prescribed burn booth at former Fort Ord Open House.



## July

- Community Bulletin #6 mailed to 50,000 Monterey County households. Bulletin #6 contains two pull-outs: a Resident's Guide to Relocation and a Resident's Guide to the Prescribed Burn (shown on following pages). Community Bulletin #6 also announces sign-up workshops in Spreckels and Seaside, and opening of relocation office.



- Updated letter sent to all 2002 relocation program applicants informing them of program changes and asking them to return an acknowledgement letter. The Army received 173 responses to the update letter. It also received 61 returned envelopes that were not deliverable. Almost all of the undeliverable envelopes were addressed to CSUMB students. Of the 173 people who returned the update letter, 101 said they would be part of the “reimbursement” program,” 2 said they would want a pre-paid room but no food vouchers, 60 said they would want both a pre-paid room and food vouchers, and 10 said they should be removed from the relocation program.