



The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) is a federal public health agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and is based in Atlanta, Georgia. ATSDR's mission is to serve the public using the best science, taking responsive public health actions, and providing trusted health information that will prevent harmful exposures and disease related to toxic substances.

Fact Sheet

Fort Ord Burn

Contents/Overview

This fact sheet summarizes the review by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) of air quality data collected during the October 2003 prescribed burn at the former Fort Ord, California. ATSDR staff determined that smoke from this burn and future burns do not present a public health hazard.

Purpose of Burns

The Army has conducted prescribed burns on several old firing ranges at Fort Ord, which are part of the long-term process for closing the former U.S. Army base. These burns remove vegetation so that workers can clean up any unexploded ordnance on the firing ranges.

Air Quality Monitoring

As the burns remove vegetation, the ordnance in the ground can explode or burn. Residents were concerned about possible adverse effects from inhaling smoke from the fires. The Army responded by putting in place an extensive air monitoring program for the October 2003 prescribed burn. The goal was to find out what was in the smoke and at what levels.

Monitoring Data Review

The Army asked ATSDR, a federal public health agency, to analyze the October 2003 monitoring data. ATSDR staff evaluated the air monitoring data in terms of chemicals that could come from military operations and chemicals that are from burning vegetation. ATSDR analyzed the on-site and off-site data for 29 of these chemicals and found the presence of 13 chemicals. These 13 chemicals are associated with burning vegetation, not military operations. Only 5 of the 13 chemicals were found off-site.

Short-term Health Effects

The burning of areas that are on the outer edge of the Fort Ord property may have contributed to short-term eye and respiratory irritation in residents who lived close to the burn areas. These symptoms would have been temporary, stopping shortly after the burning stopped. Children, elderly, and people with pre-existing respiratory conditions would be most sensitive to the effects of the burns.

Summary

Residents expressed concern about potential health effects from the former Fort Ord burns. The Army collected air samples during a prescribed burn in October 2003. ATSDR provided an independent review of these air samples to determine if the smoke presented any hazard to human health. ATSDR determined that only temporary eye and lung irritation could be expected, which are common effects from vegetation fires.

