

# Frequently Asked Questions: Fort Ord Prescribed Burns 2013

## Background

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The Army is conducting prescribed burns as part of the munitions and explosives of concern cleanup program. The prescribed burns clear vegetation which allows for the safe removal of unexploded munitions and explosives, left from the former training at Fort Ord. The Army has selected two areas: Units 7 and 10, as the burn locations should the weather conditions required for these areas be met during the 2013 burn season. These areas are scheduled to be burned sometime after July 1 as soon as weather permits. Suitable weather should include clear skies, moderate temperatures (about 45°F to 90°F), and light winds through the first 1,000 feet above the ground. These weather conditions typically occur in the fall and help minimize smoke impacts.

Unit 7 is 341 acres and Unit 10 is 327 acres. The map on page 3 shows Units 7 and 10 as well as the areas burned since 2003. All these areas are part of the recently designated Fort Ord National Monument and, following completion of cleanup, will be transferred to the Bureau of Land Management.

Besides removing vegetation for munitions clearance actions, these burns are also required under an agreement between the Army and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a part of the Installation-Wide Multispecies Habitat Management Plan. The vegetation in this area is primarily Central Maritime Chaparral which depends on periodic fires to sustain its diversity. Several rare, threatened, and endangered plant species occur in the Central Maritime Chaparral at Fort Ord. After prescribed burns, munitions cleanup will be conducted, and the vegetation will grow back as part of the natural habitat.

### Information on Proposed and Recent Prescribed Burns:

2013	Unit 7: 341 Acres, Unit 10: 327 Acres
2012	Cancelled
2011	Cancelled
2010	Unit 21: 110 Acres (October 7, 2010) Unit 15: 167 Acres (October 8, 2010)
2009	Units 14 (October 6, 2009) and Unit 19 (November 16, 2009): 461.65 acres

The Army has about 3,000 acres to burn and follow up with munitions cleanup, after the completion of burns at Units 7 and Unit 10. The Army is anticipating completing these remaining prescribed burns and associated munitions cleanup within the next 8-10 years.

# **Prescribed Burns: What They Do and How They Work**

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## **WHY IS THE ARMY CONDUCTING PRESCRIBED BURNS?**

Prescribed burns assist with removing dense vegetation which allows cleanup workers to safely enter former firing ranges and remove munitions and explosives of concern.

## **ISN'T THERE ANY WAY TO REMOVE THE VEGETATION WITHOUT PRESCRIBED BURNS?**

Because of munitions and explosives of concern on the surface, the safest and most beneficial method to the environment is prescribed burning. The Army does employ cutting in limited areas with safety precautions. For example, the Army cuts fuel breaks.

There are, however, special cases where areas must be cut. In 2011, the Army was preparing two areas for prescribed burns when two types of large artillery projectiles were encountered on the surface. They were unexploded ordnance (UXO). This was an unexpected event since these types of UXO projectiles are generally found below the ground surface. The presence of these items on the surface made these areas unsafe to burn. The items encountered required a much greater safety setback distance than had been anticipated. That distance exceeded the Army's capabilities to conduct a safe prescribed burn. Because of this, the vegetation had to be cut to allow the safe removal of UXO remaining in these areas. However, these areas will be burned in the future. The burn will take place after the munitions cleanup is completed and after the vegetation has grown back to sufficiently carry a fire. This fire adapted habitat needs fire to recover.

## **WHEN WILL THE BURN(S) OCCUR?**

Burns can occur between July 1 and December 31. A burn will be conducted when conditions meet the burn prescription. This is most likely to be in the fall, because that is when these weather conditions tend to occur. For periodic updates, call 1-800-852-9699, 831-242-7383, or go to [www.FortOrdCleanup.com](http://www.FortOrdCleanup.com)

## **WILL THE BURN(S) OCCUR ON A WEEKDAY OR ON A WEEKEND?**

The burn could occur on either a weekday or a weekend, depending on weather conditions. The most important consideration is to light the burn on any day when there will be the best opportunity for good smoke and burn behavior to minimize smoke impacts.

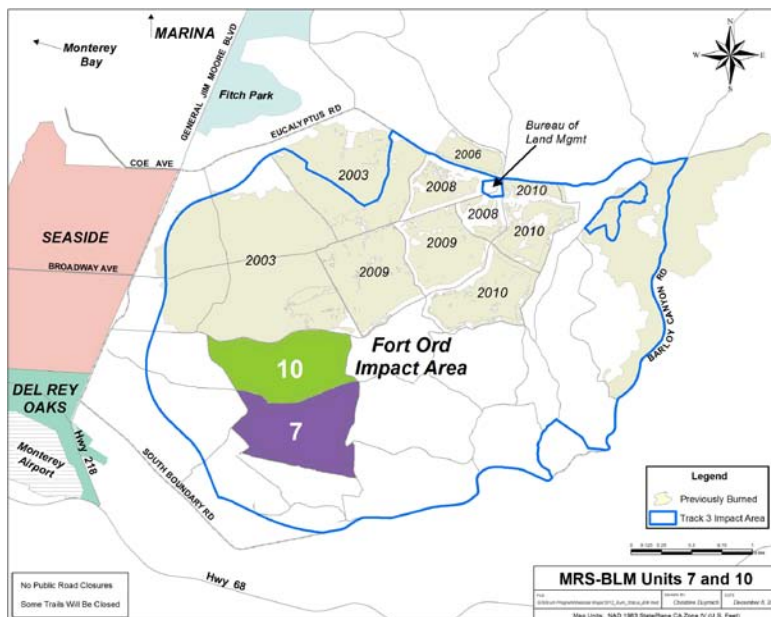
## **HOW WILL PEOPLE BE NOTIFIED WHEN THE PRESCRIBED BURN WILL OCCUR?**

People who register for the direct notification program will receive advance notification. The Army will contact them directly when decision to mobilize is made, using the phone number, text, and/or e-mail provided on their application.

The Army will also issue press releases and public service announcements to the media. Updates will be posted on the hotline (831) 242-7383, at 1-800-852-9699, and at [www.FortOrdCleanup.com](http://www.FortOrdCleanup.com). The final decision to go ahead with a burn, or postpone it, is made in the morning, after the weather conditions are known. If the decision is made to conduct a prescribed burn, each person registered in the direct notification program will be notified.

## Prescribed Burns: Where Are They Located

Burn Units 7 and 10 have been selected as burn locations should the weather conditions required for these areas be met during the 2013 burn season. The priority burn location is Unit 10 since the area is already prepared.



### WHERE ARE THE NEAREST RESIDENTIAL AREAS AND SCHOOLS?

**Nearest School:** Highland Elementary School, Seaside (about 1 mile West North West)

**Nearest Residential Area:** Seaside/Del Rey Oaks: (about 1 mile West)

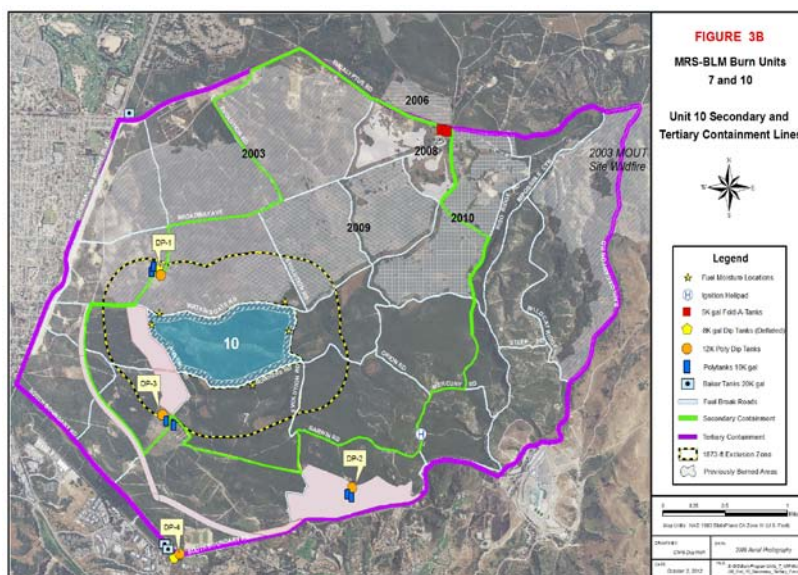
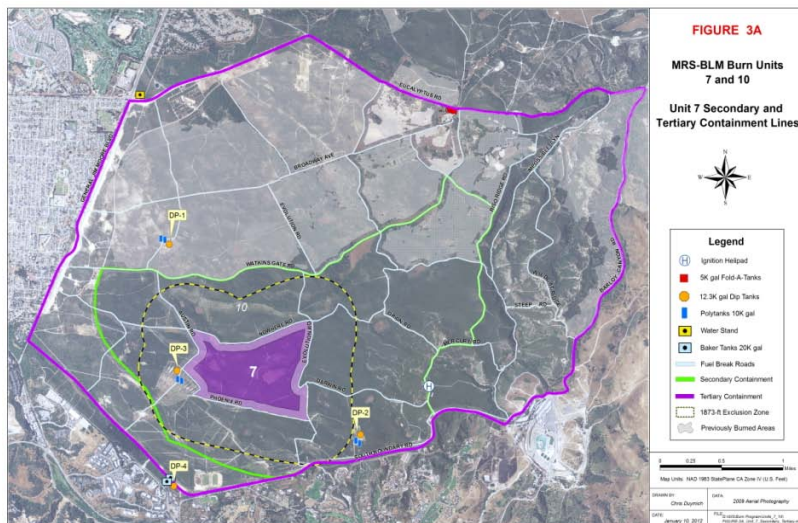
**Neighboring Areas:** Distance calculations based on closest town boundary to closest burn site boundary. Distances are considered approximate.

Neighboring Area	Approximate Distance to MRS-BLM Units 7 and 10 burn areas (7 / 10)
Seaside	1.2 / 0.9 miles W
Del Rey Oaks	1.3 / 1 mile WSW
Marina (CSUMB)	3.85 / 3.4 miles N
Mazda Raceway - Laguna Seca	1.8 / 2 miles ESE
Monterey Peninsula Airport	1.5 / 1.7 miles SW
Monterey (El Estero Park)	4.3 / 4 miles SW
Salinas (Blanco X Hwy 68)	8 miles NE
Spreckels	8 miles ENE
Salinas Valley (down to King City)	10–60 miles E to SE

## COULD ANY HOMES BE HIT BY FLYING FRAGMENTS WHEN ORDNANCE OR EXPLOSIVES ARE DETONATED DURING THE BURN?

The Department of Defense calculates the maximum distance that munitions fragments could travel after detonation for all types of munitions. Based on those calculations, the Munition with the Greatest Fragmentation Distance (MGFD) in Unit 10 is the 75mm MK1 high explosive projectile. The fragmentation distance for that munition is 1,873 feet. Based on the type of munitions known to have been used in the area of Unit 7, the 4.5" Barrage Rocket MK 3 is the munitions with the MGFD. These distances from the edges of Units 7 and 10 will be the exclusion zone during the prescribed burn for that particular unit.

No private or public buildings, public roads, or open trails are inside this very conservative exclusion zone. Few munitions are detonated by the prescribed burns. Therefore, it is very unlikely that any home or other structure will be hit by munitions fragments during the prescribed burn of either Unit 7 or Unit 10.





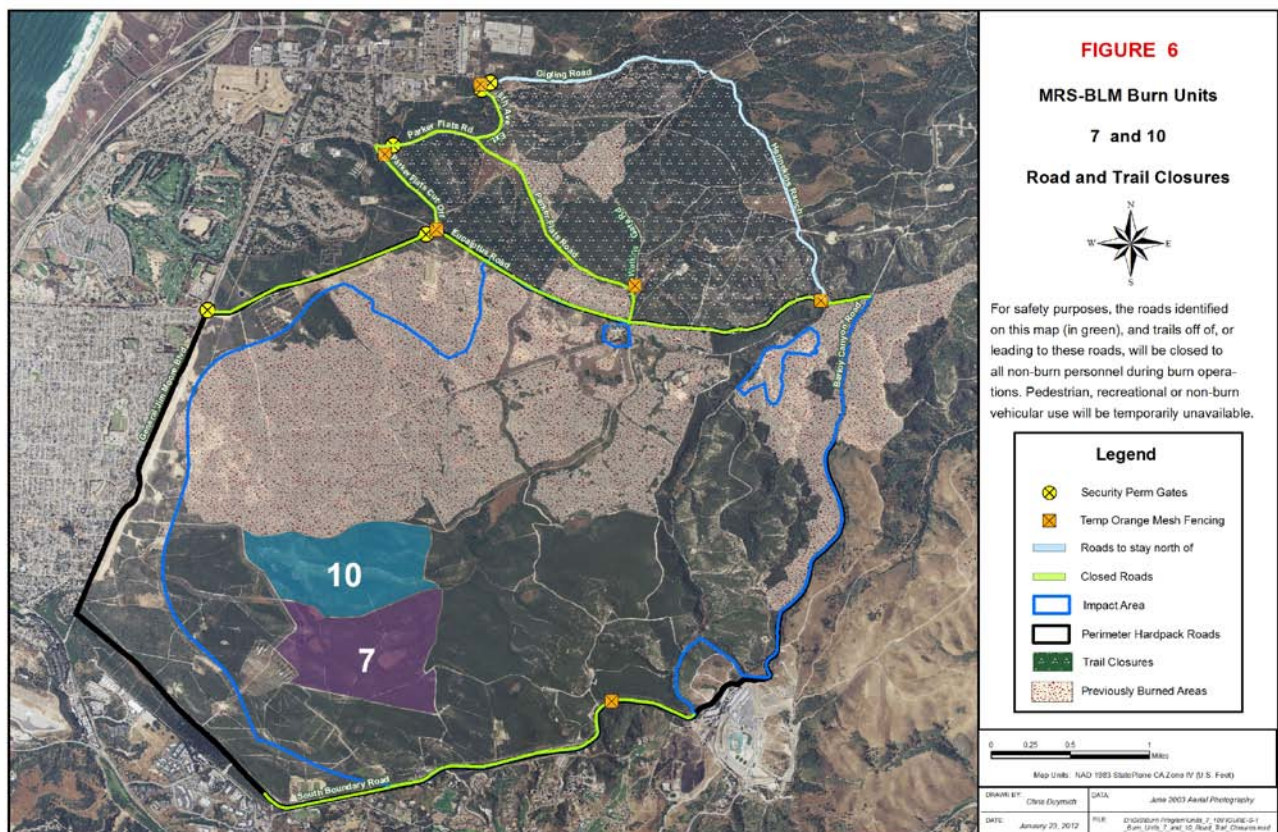
## WILL THERE BE ROAD CLOSURES RELATED TO THE BURN?

Public roads will not be closed during the prescribed burns. However, once the Army makes the decision to mobilize for a prescribed burn, several of the trails and roads that are only accessed by permitted vehicle traffic will be closed for a few days. In general, we ask that pedestrians, equestrians, and cyclists stay off the Fort Ord roads and trails that are south of Gigling Road.

**DURATION:** 24 hours prior to ignition until mop-up is complete (1- 3 days)

### LOCATION OF CLOSURES See map below:

- Eucalyptus Road will be closed to all traffic (including pedestrians and cyclists) from General Jim Moore Blvd. to Barloy Canyon Road.
- Parker Flats Road will be closed from Parker Flats Cutoff to Eucalyptus Road.
- All trails leading to Eucalyptus Road will be closed to all traffic.
- South Boundary Road at York School gate east to Laguna Seca will be closed to all traffic.



## **Prescribed Burns: Details about the smoke**

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### **WILL THE SMOKE CONTAIN DANGEROUS SUBSTANCES?**

The Army, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the California Department of Toxic Substances Control have studied this issue carefully. The agencies have concluded that substances in the smoke from this burn will not be significantly different than smoke from a prescribed burn anywhere else with similar vegetation. The technical documents that summarize these studies are available at [www.FortOrdCleanup.com](http://www.FortOrdCleanup.com).

### **WERE THESE STUDIES BASED ON ACTUAL MEASUREMENTS?**

Yes. Members of the community expressed concern that smoke from a burn at the former Fort Ord would contain toxic substances that would pose a health risk to the community. Smoke from the 2003 prescribed burn was analyzed by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (also called ATSDR). ATSDR recommended that those individuals with respiratory illnesses or who are especially sensitive to smoke should stay indoors or temporarily leave the area during burn events. The results indicated that the smoke from the Fort Ord burns is no different from other prescribed burns in similar vegetation. The study (available at [www.FortOrdCleanup.com](http://www.FortOrdCleanup.com)) also indicated that the smoke didn't include any munitions-related chemicals or compounds.

### **WILL THE BURN RELEASE RADIOACTIVITY INTO THE AIR?**

No. No weapons containing radioactive materials were ever fired on the Fort Ord ranges.

### **WILL THE PUBLIC BE EXPOSED TO DANGEROUS LEVELS OF POISON OAK IN THE AIR?**

Poison oak occurs primarily within coast live oak woodlands and is much less persistent in the extensive Central Maritime Chaparral habitat areas--the primary target of prescribed burns at Fort Ord. Small amounts of poison oak could occur in the burn areas. Burns have occurred at Fort Ord for many decades and people in the community have not reported problems with poison oak.

### **HOW LONG WILL SMOKE BE IN THE AIR?**

The burn is planned to last one day, at most, two days. Smoke could be in the air 1-2 days longer. Typically there are two phases of smoke from each burn. The first phase, referred to as the ignition phase, lasts about 4 hours following ignition. The second phase, the smolder phase, may last from 4 to 24 hours. The smoke is generally dispersed in the first 24 hours after ignition.

### **IS MY HEALTH AT RISK FROM BREATHING SMOKE?**

Health experts tell us that 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. People with existing health conditions, such as asthma or emphysema or existing heart conditions, may want to take reasonable precautions like staying indoors or relocating during the burn. You can download more information from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency website about how smoke from fires can affect your health at the following link <http://www.airnow.gov/index.cfm?action=smoke.index>.

If you need a copy of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency fact sheet “How Smoke from Fires Can Affect Your Health” or have other questions about the Fort Ord prescribed burns, please call the Fort Ord environmental cleanup hotline at 1-800-852-9699, or call (831) 242-7383, or go to the web site at [www.fortordcleanup.com](http://www.fortordcleanup.com).

### **WHAT CAN I DO TO REDUCE SMOKE EXPOSURE?**

To reduce exposure to smoke, people should consider the following precautions:

- Listen to public service advisories and be alert for further information
- Stay indoors and keep doors and windows closed
- Use room air cleaners (HEPA filter, not ozone generators)
- Drink plenty of fluids to keep your respiratory membranes moist
- Consider using an over-the-counter nasal moisturizing spray (saline)
- Reduce physical activities when smoke is present
- Stop or cut down on smoking
- When driving, put the air conditioner on recycle mode (if possible)
- Have at least a 5-day supply of prescribed medications on hand

### **WHY WAS THERE SO MUCH SMOKE FROM PAST BURNS?**

Burns in 1997, 1999 (this was not a prescribed burn, but a fire that was the result of a detonation), and 2003 produced a considerable amount of smoke near Highway 68 to the east and southeast of Fort Ord. Carmel, Pebble Beach, Pacific Grove, and Monterey also experienced smoke in 2003.

The 1997 burn was a prescribed burn that was ignited when atmospheric conditions were not ideal. The 2003 burn was planned to be 500 acres, but it actually burned 1,500 acres and weather conditions held smoke close to the ground rather than allowing it to be dissipated at high altitudes. The 1994, 1995, 2006, 2008, 2009, and 2010 burns were not as large as the others and were conducted under atmospheric conditions that produced better smoke behavior. The Army is taking extensive precautions to ensure that the burn this year will be conducted under appropriate weather conditions.

### **WHICH AREAS ARE MOST LIKELY TO BE AFFECTED BY SMOKE?**

If everything goes as planned, no areas will be seriously affected. But some smoke will be present for a short time in communities surrounding Fort Ord.

### **IS ASH HARMFUL?**

Ash is not considered a significant health risk as it is too big to be inhaled into the respiratory system. Ash and Particulate Matter (also called PM) that is 10 microns or larger are generally filtered by the respiratory system before these particles can reach the lungs. Particulate Matter that is 2.5 microns or smaller, is a much finer particulate that makes up a significant percentage of smoke that is inhaled into the lungs.

The Army is working with Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the California Department of Toxic Substances Control to conduct the prescribed burns in a manner that minimizes smoke impacts to the surrounding communities. The Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District is also posting air quality information at their web site: [www.MBUAPCD.com](http://www.MBUAPCD.com).

## **Prescribed Burns: Questions about Operations**

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### **HOW WILL THE BURN BE MANAGED?**

To make the prescribed burn more manageable the area that will be burned is surrounded by existing fuel break roads and a primary containment line is created. In fact, three containment lines (expanded fuel breaks or existing roads) are established for each burn unit. Before the burn, the burn operations team will be certain that the containment line around the perimeter of the burn unit is sufficient for management of the burn.

The burn will be managed using helicopters and wildland fire equipment. Infrared technology will be used from a helicopter to allow the burn team to “look through” the smoke and monitor the progress of the burn. Any spot fires outside the burn unit can be quickly identified and extinguished from the helicopters or wildland fire engines. Additional fire crews will be prepared to assist with additional suppression and support if needed.

### **WILL PRESCRIBED BURNS DAMAGE THE VEGETATION?**

No. In fact, in the Central Maritime Chaparral plant community, if the brush is cleared by burning, the habitat not only recovers but flourishes. If the brush is cleared by cutting, the habitat does not grow back as healthy or diverse as before.

### **WILL PRESCRIBED BURNS DAMAGE THE ANIMAL LIFE?**

Wildlife has a remarkable ability to avoid fire. Burrowing animals stay safely underground. Birds fly away. Most of the animals will simply leave the area of the burn, and will return to the area as vegetation begins to grow back.

### **WHAT WILL HAPPEN ONCE THE BURN IS OVER?**

The Army will locate and remove munitions and explosives of concern on the ground surface and digitally map the subsurface of the entire site/burn area. In selected areas, the Army will use detection equipment to locate possible munitions and explosives of concern below ground. Workers will carefully dig around the subsurface items to identify its type, and whether it could still be explosive. Explosive materials will be detonated in place, using additional explosive material that will be attached to the item.

The Fort Ord hotline announces when detonations are scheduled to occur. For detonation information, go to [www.fortordcleanup.com](http://www.fortordcleanup.com) or call 1-800-852-9699 or (831) 242-7383.



## **Prescribed Burns: Other Questions**

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### **HOW WILL THE LAND WHERE THE PRESCRIBED BURNS ARE BEING CONDUCTED BE USED AFTER IT IS CLEANED UP?**

The land associated with all the proposed burn units will be turned over to the U.S. Bureau of Land Management as part of the Fort Ord National Monument for a habitat reserve and recreation area.

### **WHY IS THE ARMY NOT OFFERING REIMBURSEMENT FOR VOLUNTARY RELOCATION?**

The Army plans to minimize impact of the smoke on the community during prescribed burns by planning smaller-sized burns and choosing specific weather conditions. In 2003, the burn was about 1,500 acres. Since that time, the Army has prepared burn areas ranging from 100 to 400 acres.