

Helping Our Peninsula's Environment

Why Is Fort Ord Burning so Harmful?

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"We had to destroy the Village in order to save it."

US Army, Vietnam 1968

"We have to burn Maritime Chaparral for its health."

US Army, Ft Ord, 2003

"ORD FIRE FUELS ANGER"

Monterey Herald Lead Headline Oct 25, 2003

If a foreign government threatened to choke our children by setting fire to Fort Ord, we would consider it an act of War.

The U.S. Army still has their crosshairs aimed at setting fire to the 30 square mile former military base at Fort Ord next to the Monterey Peninsula. They intend to burn thousands of acres of vegetation over and over for the next 10 to 15 years because they need to clean up from 70 years of not cleaning up after weapons training.

Previous Fort Ord burns have caused **huge dense, clouds of black smoke so thick it shorted out electrical power lines** and **caused people to cough over a hundred miles downwind in San Luis Obispo County.** **Flames from the October 2003 burn threatened homes in Seaside, and fumigated the cities of Seaside, Monterey, Del Rey Oaks and Carmel and homes near York School.**

This was even predicted by HOPE in an alert sent out to Emergency Centers the day before.



The Army admits the smoke could remain in our air up to three days after each burn (the 2003 fire was not fully put out until Wednesday - 6 days after it was set) yet they arrogantly *refuse to admit that the smoke causes any harmful health impacts to the thousands of local children, residents who have asthma, the elderly and shut-ins.*

The Army also refuses to analyze the potentially significant environmental harm from the smoke on people's health, businesses and the food we eat from Salinas Valley agriculture or investigate non-burning alternatives - even though Federal law and common morality clearly requires them to do so.

Here's why we need an Environmental Impact Statement:

1) SIMPLE SMOKE IS DEADLY

Smoke from burning vegetation is harmful all by itself to normal people - independent of the poison oak smoke and the toxic smoke. The most common cause of death in a building fire is smoke inhalation.

"60,000 U.S. residents per year die from breathing particulates at or below legally allowed levels" - U.S. EPA, Joel Schwartz 1991; That EPA study did not even include people harmed by breathing the pungent smoke from fires - only from industrial and vehicle pollution.

Vegetation Smoke alone causes and worsens asthma. The Air District Lawsuit against the Army has air pollution experts describing the smoke cloud as a "thick plume of dark smoke" at some 15 miles away from the burn location.

2) CHILDREN AND ELDERLY HAVE HIGHER RISK

Vegetation smoke's harm is even worse on children and elderly. The wealth of evidence behind the EPA's new standard for fine particulates (smoke) demonstrates the serious health consequences for everyone, but especially for sensitive populations, such as children, the elderly, and those with heart and lung disease.

3) WE'RE BREATHING POISON OAK SMOKE TOO

Burning Vegetation at Fort Ord also makes clouds of Poison Oak smoke.

Poison Oak smoke is more harmful than simple vegetation burning. It can be lethal for some people breathe poison oak smoke into their lungs. In California, the poison oak shrub or vine is everywhere except the "inner city," the hotter deserts, and above 4,000 feet elevation.

"Never burn [Poison Oak] plants. The urushiol can spread in the smoke and cause serious lung irritation." - FDA Consumer magazine (September 1996)

"Urushiol can be vaporized when exposed to a fire. If you have a neighbor who is burning poison ivy, the resin will rise with the smoke. If you are downwind when the resin cools off and rains back down to earth, you could receive a coat of urushiol on any uncovered areas resulting in a surprise case of poison ivy."

"Under no circumstances should you burn the plant; the smoke is as potent as the plant itself. Inhaling the smoke can produce a systemic reaction, including potentially serious, and life-threatening, lung inflammation." Charles H. Booras, M.D. Listed in "The Best Doctors in America", 2000. Listed in "How to Find the Best Doctors: Florida - 1st Edition".

Caution: Burning poison oak can result in a dangerous smoke that can cause severe symptoms to the eyes, nose, throat and lungs. -UC Davis Health System Website

"Burning poison oak results in an extremely dangerous smoke that can cause severe symptoms to the eyes, nose, throat and lungs. A severe allergic reaction from inhaling the smoke, 'anaphylaxis', is life-threatening. Burning is not recommended as inhaling dust and ash from the smoke can result in poisoning of the lungs that can require hospitalization. Never burn the plants. The urushiol carried in smoke from burning poison ivy is extremely toxic. It can cause lung infections and a rash all over one's body." -The Cooperative Extension Service includes The University of Georgia and Ft. Valley State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and counties of the State of Georgia.

Poison Oak's smoke's harm is even harsher on children and elderly.

3b) EATING POISON OAK OILS

Agricultural crops downwind from burning poison oak can pass the poison oak oil along on food. Salinas Valley's agricultural bounty is immediately downwind of the burning.

4) BURNING AMMUNITION SPREADS DEADLY CHEMICAL GASES

"Some explosives, when burned, emit toxic fumes." Former Fort Ord Engineering Evaluation/Cost Analysis pg 4-13

Burning Fort Ord's vegetation ignites massive amounts of unexploded ammunition, grenades and rockets.

"It was going off like popcorn." said one fireman. Air District Manager Doug Quetin testified "I heard a substantial number of small explosions coming from the area of the [August 25, 1997] fire." That 32 acre fire went out of control because the fire fighting personnel had to be pulled back because "there was too much ordnance detonating." (Air District Report)

Also according to Quetin the "thick plume of dark smoke" extended past Chulular - some 15 miles from the burn location. Others report tracking the smoke plume south all the way down the Salinas Valley to San Luis Obispo County - **over 100 miles away.**

In addition the Army explodes a pile of recovered unexploded ammunition, grenades and rockets every Wednesday afternoon.

The unexploded ammunition, grenades and rockets are considered hazardous waste because contain they contain materials which are toxic both before and after burning.

Some known toxics burned in the Fort Ord vegetation include the explosives HMX (liver and central nervous system toxicity), and RDX (can cause seizures), Lead, and Cadmium - a radioactive metal.

5) DIOXINS - THE MOST TOXIC CHEMICAL ON EARTH

Whenever materials containing chlorine are burned, dioxins can be produced. The unexploded ammunition, grenades, bombs and rockets do contain products with chlorine (propellants, cases).

"[Dioxins are known] to the public as 'the most toxic chemical on earth.'" There are 75 chemicals in the dioxin family.

A National Academy of Sciences 1993 report "found sufficient evidence to link exposure to dioxin-contaminated herbicides to three cancers: soft-tissue sarcoma, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, and Hodgkin's disease." "Our Stolen Future", 1999.

As little as one billionth of an ounce can cause chloracne in humans as well as headaches, dizziness, digestive upsets, and pain. Larger doses can cause cancers, liver and kidney problems, stillbirths, birth defects and immune suppression. Scientific American, "Dioxin" Feb. 1986 Tshirley

"Guinea pigs died after swallowing only one-millionth of a gram per kilogram of Body weight." "Our Stolen Future", 1999. p 113

Trout eggs or newly hatched fish exposed to doses of as little as 40 parts per trillion begin to show significant mortality. "By one hundred parts per trillion, all the eggs die." "Our Stolen Future", 1999. p 157

6) UNCONTROLLABLE WARFARE AMMUNITION DAMAGE OVER A MILE WIDE

The Army wrote in their 1994 evaluation report (and confirmed at a 2000 RAB hearing) that the "bombs and projectiles with a diameter of 5 inches or more" will explode and send hot fragments some four thousand feet (4,000) and **will start secondary fires "with 100 percent certainty!"** This means those hot fragments can travel anywhere in a circle of 8000 foot diameter and start a new fire. Former Fort Ord EE/CA pg 4-12

It also means that any humans, buildings or wildlife within 4,000 feet could be hit with the burning metal fragments.

The August 25 1997 event was only intended to burn 32 acres. It went out of control and incinerated 700 acres due to burning ordnance flying over the intended fire boundaries. The fire fighting crew had to be pulled back because "there was too much ordnance detonating." (Air District Report)

7) FLYING SHRAPNEL CAUSES SECONDARY FIRES

White hot, burning shrapnel will fly up to 4000 feet (almost a mile) and start secondary fires with 100 percent certainty. The Army's own EE/CA admits this and when questioned the ARMY reaffirmed this in a public meeting.

"non-fragmenting explosive material will have a debris distance of 1,250 feet, whereas bombs and projectiles with a diameter of 5 inches or more will have a debris distance of 4,000 feet." Former Fort Ord EE/CA pg 4-12

Fort Ord Burns are Inherently Out of Control

"Prescribed burns often get out of control and damage property. They would more accurately be called **Prescribed Arson**. As Stephen J. Pyne of Arizona State University points out, some of the most deadly fires of the past 20 years were prescribed burns gone awry." -Scientific American, Aug 2000

Each of the three recent burns were admittedly out of control. The inherent reason is that the fire fighters cannot safely get any closer than 4,000 feet from the fire, and aircraft cannot get any closer than 1,800 feet.

8) CHEAPER ALTERNATES EXIST !!!

As of 2001 the ARMY has admitted MECHANICAL brush removal costs about half as much as burning brush. \$500 per acre for mechanical removal vs. \$900 per acre to BURN the vegetation.

When the ARMY made their original decision to burn they said that mechanical removal would cost five thousand dollars (\$5,000) per acre and burning would only cost one hundred dollars (\$100) per acre. The dollars have significantly changed, and now have reversed which method is the cheaper, but the ARMY's decision hasn't yet changed.

The best known *Non-Burning Alternatives* include -

1. Helicopter Electromagnetic Sensors with Global Positioning System which creates highly detailed "Where to Dig maps", and

2. Fluorescent Microbes sprayed by crop dusters which glow to show precisely where the live ammunition is buried (the microbes die after a day or two in sunlight).

9) BOGUS REASONS

The ARMY claims their *urgent* reason for needing burning is to halt access to the areas where dangerous ammunition is lying around so teenagers and gangs can't go prospecting for explosives. They assert that fencing inherently cannot keep people out. Sounds pretty good doesn't it? Of course no one wants children to get hurt.

The Army's magnitude of hypocrisy is revealed when you realize they --

1) Have put permanently off limits to public use several square miles in the Fort Ord's center containing the highest amounts of UXO (the most dangerous area). The only barrier to teenagers and gangs will be what? - you guessed it **fencing - which the ARMY has already said "inherently cannot keep people out."**

How is it that the most dangerous area is merely fenced and won't be burned, yet the less dangerous areas can't be protected by fencing and must be burned? (Is it because **the less dangerous areas are slated for golf courses and subdivisions?)**

2) just opened the Del Rey Oaks Gate with newly paved and widened roads - opening massive access from the South that has been closed for a decade. The Army has now given huge new access to these areas containing UXO to cars, trucks, bicycles, motorcycles, and kids just playing around.

3) The Army refuses to acknowledge that flames threatened real people and real homes in Seaside in the 2003 fire - because the fire fighters simply cannot get close enough to stop or slow the flames.

10) NATURAL FIRES INSIGNIFICANT

Fort Ord experiences among the world's lowest incidence of non-polar onshore frequency of thunderstorms, lightning and lightning caused fires.



A decade long study of 101,000 California fires found that along with Santa Cruz County we experience the lowest frequency of fires in California. When fires do not occur naturally, it is not necessary to create them. (Keeley, J. E., Distribution of lightning and man-caused wildfires in California, U.S. Forest Service. 1981)

Table 7--Calculated recurrence interval for lightning-caused wildfires alone and all wildfires on CDF land. Recurrence interval in years = total area/average area burned per year.

Ranger Unit	Years	
	Lightning Fires Alone	All Fires
1. San Diego	3,117	197
2. Orange	37,857	9
3. Riverside	281	13
4. San Bernardino	3,280	369
5. San Luis Obispo	26,842	174
6. San Benito-Monterey	70,078	369
7. San Mateo-Santa Cruz	170,909	167
8. Santa Clara	772	45
9. Sonoma	79,184	63
10. Lake-Napa	19,541	51
11. Mendocino	15,163	239
12. Shasta-Trinity	103	73
13. Humboldt-Del Norte	2,695	159
14. Tulare	3,585	174
15. Fresno-Kings	2,899	132
16. Madera-Mariposa	483	119
17. Inyo-Mono	11,748	355
18. Tuolumne-Calaveras	2,477	52
19. Amador-Eldorado	3,267	27
20. Nevada-Yuba-Placer	27,132	48
21. Butte	2,786	86
22. Tehama-Glenn	3,113	32
23. Siskiyou	1,081	166
24. Lassen-Modoc	55	53

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) should be prepared. It is required by federal policy and law to analyze and expose the real danger and risk to human health from burning and to fairly evaluate the **alternative opportunities** from non-burning, non-destructive ordnance detection and mechanical removal methods.

HOLD FARR'S FEET TO THE FIRE

Sam Farr loudly demands an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Navy Bombing at Hunter Liggett, and the Monterey Presidio Gate Closing, but he has refused to lift a finger to protect children, workers our elderly and Salinas Valley food crops from this deadly smoke.

Other than a federal Judge, Congressman Farr is one of the few people who can insist upon an EIS and stop the burning.

FARR'S BOGUS EXCUSES:

In a Herald interview April 6, 2003 Farr admitted his greatest weakness is "**That I don't have enough patience to work with people who want to remain ignorant.**" **Compare that idea with Farr's public position persistently refusing to request an Environmental Impact Statement -**

"TOO MUCH PUBLIC COMMENT"

Farr has publicly argued that "the public has had enough time, 8 years, to comment on the burning."

This is simply false. Farr may be mistaking the EIS prepared for the Base *Reuse*. There has been no Health Assessment - period. There has been no Environmental Impact Assessment (EIS) on the Burning. There is no Burning Plan Document which anyone has ever had a chance to comment on.

SAME DECISION?

Farr also claims that even if the EPA prepares an EIS, the decision will be the same and it will just waste time.

Basically, Farr is making the same objection every subdivision developer uses. The real reasons neither wants to do environmental analysis is because it publicly tells you that the environmental damage could be a lot worse than the developers want to have to face and pay for. It also makes them **seriously consider Alternatives**, substantively respond to questions and put it **all in one document** (not the 297 the Army has now) and **written in English** that everyone can understand.

When the results of an EIS are read and discussed by the public and in the media - very often a better alternative is chosen - such as helicopter magnetometer GPS systems, and mechanical vegetation removal.

DIFFERENT BUT EQUAL?

Finally, Farr brushes aside respectful requests from mothers asking for a health assessment who are concerned about their children's health risk with "They're making a document that is a functional equivalent of an EIS."

You're the judge - If they are truly preparing a functionally equivalent document (something like genuine imitation ice-milk) -

WHY AREN'T THEY PREPARING A REAL ONE?

FAKE HEALTH ASSESSMENT

The fake Environmental Impact Statement is called an "RI/FS" for Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study. **This study did NOT analyze the impacts of the flames or smoke on people living outside Fort Ord or the impacts of Poison Oak smoke on Salinas Valley agriculture!**

BURY THEM IN PAPER AND MEETINGS

In fact, the RI/FS is not one document but FOUR RI/FS documents. This is entirely consistent with the Army's practice of burying the public in documents so they can't tell which one is important. The Congressional Hearing revealed the Army has now produced 297 documents about Fort Ord Cleanup. The ARMY has held dozens, maybe over one hundred meaningless meetings pretending to provide public participation. As one person observed **"Real Public Participation means we can make a difference in the outcome. Here - we're just along for the ride."**

Please **Call Congressman Sam Farr** (831) 649 3555 (Monterey) and (831) 429 1975 (Santa Cruz) and tell him you want him to write the U.S. EPA and demand they prepare an **Environmental Impact Statement** and a **Genuine Evaluation of Non-Burning Alternatives** on Burning Fort Ord.

[Or click here to send an "Instant-Email"](#)

Thank you sincerely.

For more information please contact :

Say NO to Fort Ord TOXIC BURNINGS! at 831/384 7658,

Life 2000, Christine Bettencourt, 831-674-1773,

Save Our Air Resources. Linda Millerick at 831/484 2834,

[Helping Our Peninsula's Environment](#) at 831/624-6500

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