

# Military Installations Present Unusual Challenges

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## Organizational Challenges

As with many other types of contaminated sites, it can be difficult to get regulatory agencies or the Army to recognize environmental problems. Communities must organize, which may be more difficult than at other sites because of the rural nature of many military installations or the diversity of constituents near the site. The most common organizational tool to involve communities at military installations is the Restoration Advisory Board (RAB). Communities must also deal with the military's complex bureaucracy and procedures, which are added on top of other EPA and state requirements. .

- The Fort Ord RAB was disbanded prior to FOEJN becoming the lead community organization involved in the cleanup, via an EPA grant. The Army has been reluctant to reestablish the RAB since FOEJN became involved in the process.
- The complex procedures the Army uses forces FOEJN to devote large amounts of time to just keeping up with the bureaucracy.
- Public meetings have been called with short notice, making it difficult to organize effective responses.

The Fort Ord Environmental Justice Network, Inc (FOEJN), involves and gives voice to the impacted community residents who live around and in the former Fort Ord Superfund site in Monterey County, California surrounded by the cities of Marina, Seaside, Salinas & heavily populated with residents living on the site. FOEJN identified clean-up priorities of concern to local residents, which pose the greatest health threats. With the help of the EPA Technical Assistance Grant, FOEJN hired a Technical Advisor, Dr. Peter deFur, to summarize the complex technical documents and to include comments of concern from impacted local residents. These reports are entered into the Administrative Record and are available at FOEJN weekly community meetings. FOEJN also holds workshops and community-wide events to engage and educate impacted communities in the decision making processes. Educational materials and handouts are available at the local office to bring a greater awareness to local residents who bear the greater burden of health & economic impacts.



Chemical weapons training at Fort Ord



Explosive UXO after a prescribed burn at Fort Ord



The 2003 prescribed burn following tankle over the town of Marina

Courtesy www.dainimg.com

## Cultural Challenges

The military possesses a completely different culture than the general public or the regulatory agencies that community organizations generally interact with. Dealing with the chain of command can be frustrating for those not accustomed to it, and military bureaucracy can be quite cumbersome. These two factors have the effect of creating a kind of policy inertia which can be difficult to overcome. By the same token, the military often begins remediation efforts with little understanding of cultural traditions in African American, Native American, Hispanic, and other minority and low income communities. There are also significant cultural differences between the military and regulatory agencies. Disagreements between local, state, and federal regulatory agencies and the military can be common. For a cleanup to be successful, all of these cultural differences must be overcome.

- There is reluctance by the Army at Fort Ord to actively communicate and work with people of color and low income communities in the area.
- Clinton's Executive Order SB1298 regarding environmental justice is not being adequately observed in the cleanup process. Health clinics have not been opened in low income areas and minorities have been left out of the economic redevelopment process. The Army, local officials, and communities all have differing values and visions in the economic redevelopment of the base.
- The Army frequently has not involved the community, the EPA, or state agencies in many of its decision making processes.

## Environmental Problems at Military Installations

Military installations throughout the country frequently have significant environmental impacts that have resulted from long term use by the military, and Fort Ord is no exception. Installations where training or testing has been conducted with live ordnance will have to locate and remove any unexploded ordnance (UXO) that may remain. Depending on the age of the installation, some weapons may contain chemical warfare agents. The improper use and disposal of various industrial compounds or the use of unlined landfills can cause extensive soil and groundwater contamination as well. Fort Ord was a particularly large installation and all of these concerns have surfaced at the site.

### Fort Ord Specific Concerns

- **Landfills:** Two landfills at the former installation have leaked extensively, causing widespread groundwater contamination from compounds like trichloroethene and vinyl chloride.
- **Carbon Tetrachloride Plume:** The use and improper disposal of large quantities of the cleaning solvent carbon tetrachloride have resulted in groundwater contamination of three separate aquifers at the site.
- **Unexploded Ordinance (UXO):** Decades of training with live ammunition have littered the site with unexploded rockets, mortars, grenades, and other ordnance. These hazards prevent any redevelopment on the base.
- **Small Arms Firing Ranges:** Live fire training with small arms has contaminated soil in several areas of the site with lead, copper, and zinc from expended ammunition.
- **Health Concerns from Contamination:** The above problems have resulted in the potential for the public to be exposed to many contaminants including heavy metals and a number of carcinogens. Minimizing health risks to the public is one of FOEJN's chief concerns.
- **Public Health:** One of FOEJN's goals is educating Federal and local decision makers of the need for an environmental justice health center and clinic at the Fort Ord site. One of the first uses for excess property on Federal land should be set aside for these types of facilities
- **Economic Revitalization:** It is important to insure that the local community is not left out of any potential economic gains from the cleanup and transfer of the former Fort Ord. FOEJN is working to make sure that the promised living wage jobs and affordable housing of local low income community members is not forgotten in the rush for economic gain.
- **Burning:** The Army continues to plan prescribed burns in close proximity to local communities even though the last burn went out of control, burning more than twice the proposed amount.



Proximity of Fort Ord landfills to military housing



FOEJN Members at a Memorial Day event in 2006

## Information and Communication Challenges

Community organizations involved in the cleanup of military installations face greater hurdles to obtain information about the site and the cleanup process than those at other types of contaminated sites. One of the most difficult to deal with is the record keeping by the military during the early part of the 20th century. Sometimes these problems are compounded by the classified nature of some activities at military installations. All these factors can make keeping the process open to the public more difficult.

It is difficult for the military to involve the general public, who will require frequent meetings, newsletters, and other community involvement efforts to stay informed. The military has to devote time and money to this effort.

- At Fort Ord, there are three operable units and several large firing ranges simultaneously undergoing remediation, in addition to economic revitalization efforts and property transfers.
- The Technical Advisor to FOEJN has received 13 separate reports in a single month related to the site's cleanup; enough to swamp most small community organizations.
- Poor record keeping has resulted in great uncertainties regarding the location of contamination, unexploded ordnance, and the potential of chemical warfare agents.



Aerial view of Fort Ord when it was still an air



Similar photo of ordnance from the 2003 prescribed burn