

SALTON SEA TEST BASE

SOUTHWEST DIVISION NAVAL FACILITIES ENGINEERING COMMAND



FACT SHEET

DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

INTRODUCTION

This is the last in a series of monthly fact sheets developed to provide accurate and timely information about the environmental cleanup at the Salton Sea Test Base (SSTB). The cleanup is nearing completion and after this, fact sheets will be produced only as needed.

The environmental cleanup at SSTB has been underway for more than three years. During that time, the Navy has actively included the local community and other interested public members in sharing information on the project. The Navy's SSTB Project Manager has spoken to local groups and organizations about the project. In addition, Restoration Advisory Board meetings have been held regularly to present and discuss information about the cleanup and other related topics. Throughout these three years several questions recur. Below are responses to four of the most commonly asked questions about the environmental cleanup and the future of SSTB. Any additional questions may be directed to the representatives listed on the back of this fact sheet.

What Will Happen to the Land When the Navy Leaves?

SSTB is made up of Navy-owned land and land leased from the Department of the Interior, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the Imperial Irrigation District. The leased parcels will be returned to the owners. The Navy-owned land was made available to other federal agencies during a required screening process. The property was available to agencies willing to prepare and submit a reuse plan with the Local Redevelopment Authority (in this case the County of Imperial).

The Local Redevelopment Authority received and approved a reuse plan from the Department of the Interior on behalf of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and BLM. In late summer 1997, the Navy will formally transfer SSTB property to the Department of the Interior. The parcels within the Salton Sea will go to USFWS and the land parcels to BLM. The USFWS will expand the Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge from the eastern to the western shore of the Salton Sea. SSTB has prime dune habitat for the flat-tailed horned lizard and BLM will manage the property for this species of concern. It is expected that the two small parcels of SSTB property that are not on the main base will be sold to adjacent landowners.

Will the Archaeological Sites Located at the Base be Protected - Will the Public be Able to See Them?

Currently, the archaeological sites at the base are being protected by the Navy, as required by state and federal law. Anyone caught tampering with or removing any archaeological remains will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. The BLM is also required to abide by these laws and protect the sites once the transfer of property is made. The type of protection required will be determined after the appropriate regulatory agencies have reviewed the archaeological information collected over the past 3 years. Many factors will be taken into consideration.

This review may also help determine whether some sites will be made accessible to the public.

Information regarding historic and prehistoric archaeological resources is considered proprietary. To protect these resources, their locations are often kept confidential. This decision, however, will be made by BLM, not the Navy.

What if Contamination is Found After the Navy Leaves?

There is no question who is responsible for contamination related to military activities at SSTB. The Navy feels that environmental investigation and cleanup activities conducted during the last 3 years have been successful in locating and evaluating contamination generated by its past activities. However, if contamination associated with past military activities is discovered in the future, the federal government is required by law to assume full responsibility.

How Does the Navy Know There is No Radiation Contamination at SSTB?

The Navy's investigation included interviewing past tenants and former SSTB employees, as well as reviewing countless documents, many of which were declassified by the government solely for this cleanup project. The test units, or dummy bombs, dropped at the land targets and those targets in the Salton Sea were tested to evaluate in-flight aerodynamics (how they fell to the ground), not for explosive power. The test units stored at designated locations at the base were examined to see how their internal components weathered in a desert environment. Based on this information and information documenting other practices conducted during the time the base was active, the Navy feels that radioactive materials were not used at SSTB.

To respond to public concerns and satisfy the regulatory agencies, it was necessary to provide hard data that prove radiological issues do not exist at SSTB. As part of its comprehensive environmental investigation, the Navy routinely conducted radiological screening as samples were collected. More than 700 samples were taken during the investigations. Radioactivity is easy to detect, and any undisclosed radioactive material usage would have been detected during this investigation.

RAB Update

As the end of the SSTB cleanup project nears, the Navy is scheduling its final activities. These activities are as follows:

- The next Restoration Advisory Board meeting will be held on **May 9, 1997**, at 7:00 p.m., at the West Shores Senior Citizens' Club.
- A draft report called a No Further Action Record of Decision (ROD) will be released this summer for public review and comment. The ROD will serve as the final closure document for SSTB. The ROD will provide an overview of the cleanup program, and will document the completion of the environmental work which supports the no further action decision.
- A 30-day public comment period will be held during which the public will be asked to submit comments on the draft ROD. In addition, the Navy will hold a public meeting to further explain the ROD and to accept additional comments. Representatives from the Navy, and federal and state environmental agencies will be available to answer questions. A formal response to public comments, called a Responsiveness Summary, will be included in the final ROD.
- Prior to property transfer, the Navy will host a final bus tour of the base. The tour will most likely occur during summer. By that time, safety restrictions will have been lifted and participants will be allowed off the bus. It is expected to be a very interesting experience. The date of this tour will be announced once it has been scheduled. As always, the public is welcome to attend the meetings and site tour.

Information Repositories for the SSTB cleanup project have been established at two locations in the area so that the local community has the opportunity to review project documents and reports: ▶

In addition, documents, reports, and Restoration Advisory Board meeting minutes and agendas are available at the reading room of the Salton City Spa and RV Park in Salton City. Please contact Ms. Shirley Lee Palmer at (619) 394-4333 for hours.

Salton City Library

2098 Frontage Road (Hwy 86)
Salton City, CA (619) 394-4446

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8:00 AM - NOON
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(except holidays)

For More Information

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INSIDE:

SSTB Q&A