

Ramona Burn Dump Consolidate and Cap Project
Community Relations Plan
Unincorporated Area of Ramona, Cleveland National Forest, San Diego County

A. Overview

The Ramona Burn Dump Site, a former solid waste disposal site located on National Forest System lands, was identified as having a release or threat of release of hazardous substances. A non-time critical removal action is being undertaken to address this problem. In collaboration with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Services (Forest Service), the County of San Diego (County) will be consolidating and capping in place contaminated soil and burn ash material into a smaller footprint; installing an improved soil cap with a geotechnical layer and drainage conveyance; revegetating for erosion control; improving site security; and conducting soil sampling and analysis.

The primary sources of contamination at the Site are waste debris and ash from the burn dump operated by the County from July 1948 through September 30, 1969, under a series of special use permits issued by the Forest Service. This threat is posed by the presence of and continued release of heavy metals (antimony, arsenic, barium, cadmium, chromium, cobalt, copper, lead, nickel, selenium, and zinc), dioxins, and furans in soils at the site. The site was identified following the Witch Creek fire in November 2007, when vegetation in the area was burned and surface debris from the site was exposed.

On January 22, 2008, the Solid Waste Local Enforcement Agency (LEA) issued a notification to the Forest Service and the County about the condition of the site and required that it be brought into compliance with State minimum standards for cover soil, erosion control, and site security. Since the original notification in 2008, the LEA has conducted regular inspections of the property and has consistently noted the same areas of concern. A site evaluation in 2008 determined that there was a release or threat of release of hazardous substances at the site. A subsequent engineering evaluation/cost analysis (EE/CA) document prepared to describe the possible response actions and their consequences has been completed and the removal action memorandum prepared. The final agreement, or consent decree, between the Forest Service and County that outlined response efforts for the Ramona Burn Dump was filed with the U.S. District Court on June 5, 2023. While the Forest Service will remain as owners of the site, the County will bring the site back into compliance with State regulations and will be the party responsible for ongoing maintenance and monitoring. The Forest Service is responsible for overseeing the work performed by the County and has approval authority over all project deliverables. This community relations plan describes how the Forest Service and County will inform the public of upcoming removal action activities at the Site.

B. Site Description

The Ramona Burn Dump site encompasses approximately 3.5 acres located on Dump Road, immediately north of the Ramona Landfill, approximately 4 miles north of Ramona, within the Cleveland National Forest, San Diego County, California. The site is located at an average elevation of 1,600 feet above mean sea level on a small ridge that trends roughly east–west and is flanked by two natural drainages that merge just east of the site. Downstream (to the east), the drainage becomes an unnamed ephemeral creek that joins Santa Ysabel Creek, within 0.5 mile of the site. Lake Hodges is located further downstream while Sutherland Reservoir is upstream of the site. The site is not located within a mapped floodplain and is not accessible to the general public.

In accordance with the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), the Forest Service has selected a removal action for the Ramona Burn Dump Site where heavy metals, dioxins, and furans were exposed during the 2007 Witch Creek fire. The former Ramona Burn Dump was operated by the County for the disposal of trash and rubbish from the community of Ramona and surrounding areas. Under the terms of the special use permit (initially issued to the County in 1947 by the Forest Service), the County was to confine the dumping to constructed pits within the permit area and ashes were to be placed in a separate pit. When the special use permit was terminated in 1974, waste disposal at the site ceased and the Site was covered by a layer of soil. In November 2007, the Witch Creek fire burned vegetation in the area and revealed that the cover material had eroded and exposed burn ash and waste debris at the Site.

C. Background on Burn Ash and Waste Hazard Present

Burn ash and waste was observed over the entire site area and varied from one foot to 11 feet thick with the thickest portions located in two large north-south trending trenches. Several erosional gullies were also observed, and debris was found to be in the drainages. Soil cover was less than 1 foot thick over most of the site.

The preliminary assessment/site inspection (PA/SI) report completed for the Site in May 2010 by ERRG concluded that “Elevated concentrations of metals (arsenic, lead, and zinc) and 2,3,7,8-TCDD were consistently detected exceeding [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency] EPA industrial [regional screening levels] RSLs. Based on the pH range of waste samples, the results of leachability testing, and the solubility of each [chemical of concern] COC, it is likely that some leaching of lead has occurred. Arsenic and zinc were not shown to be likely to leach and 2,3,7,8-TCDD is considered unlikely to have leached because of its low water solubility.”

The PA/SI further stated that, “A preliminary groundwater pathway analysis concluded that COCs from the site are unlikely to have been released to groundwater at concentrations that will pose risk to human health or the environment. The surface water pathway preliminary analysis recommended further action to address the release of burn ash and waste materials to the surface water pathway. Metals (especially lead) in burn ash and waste materials at the Ramona Burn Dump Site may pose a threat to downstream municipal surface water supplies and may ultimately have a negative impact on downstream sensitive environments, including critical habitat for the arroyo toad and sensitive wetland environments. The preliminary analysis of soil and air pathways

concluded that no known targets are associated with either pathway and neither pathway is considered likely to adversely impact human health or the environment.”

D. Community Background

The Ramona Burn Dump Site is located in San Diego County, in the Palomar Ranger District of the Cleveland National Forest, California. The site is on National Forest System lands in Wildcat Canyon, Pamo Valley, approximately 4 miles north of the city of Ramona, California. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Ramona’s population was 20,292. The burn site is located more than half a mile from any homes or businesses and neither the Forest Service nor the County has received any public inquiries or concerns regarding the site.

E. Communications Program

Prior to the start of construction, the Forest Service and County will conduct outreach to property owners and residents in the community through social media postings, describing the nature and expected duration of the construction activities, how to keep informed of project progress, and how to contact the Forest Service and County with any concerns. Project information will also be available through each agency’s webpages.

The administrative record and EE/CA document are at the Ramona Branch of the San Diego County Library located at 1275 Main Street, Ramona, California.

The designated contact at the Forest Service is Amy Reid, District Ranger, Cleveland National Forest, at 760-788-0250, amy.reid@usda.gov.

The designated contacts for the County are Leanne Crow, CIP Project Manager, at 619-335-9744, Leanne.Crow@sdcounty.ca.gov and Erin Bechtol, Closed Landfills Unit Manager, at 619-816-9329, Erin.Bechtoll@sdcounty.ca.gov.