



Virginia Capes (VACAPES) Range Complex

Environmental Impact
Statement/Overseas
Environmental Impact
Statement (EIS/OEIS)

BACKGROUND

The Virginia Capes (VACAPES) Range Complex is a combination of land, sea and airspace where Navy training is conducted. The Navy is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (EIS/OEIS) to comprehensively evaluate effects of current and future Navy activities within the VACAPES Range Complex on the environmental, natural, cultural and socioeconomic resources. This comprehensive evaluation is part of a larger Navy program, the Tactical Training Theater Assessment and Planning (TAP) Program. Under the TAP Program, the Navy will for the first time manage its training areas within broad geographic locations known as range complexes. The VACAPES Range Complex is one of several range complexes on the east coast.

WHY IS THIS NEEDED NOW?

Realistic training is the single greatest asset the military has in preparing and protecting Navy personnel. "Train As We Fight" is not just a phrase - it is a statement of the absolute necessity to realistically train Navy personnel for the conditions in which they may find themselves while protecting our nation.

International events, changes in technology, base closures, and population growth are increasing the challenges the Navy faces in training its personnel to be prepared to defend our nation. To face these challenges and continue to provide combat capable forces that are ready to deploy worldwide, the Navy is comprehensively evaluating and planning activities at the range complex level. The purpose for the proposed action is to:

- Achieve and maintain Fleet readiness using the VACAPES Range Complex to support and conduct current, emerging, and future training operations and RDT&E operations;
- Expand warfare missions supported by the VACAPES Range Complex; and
- Upgrade and modernize existing range capabilities to enhance and sustain Navy training and Research, Development, Test & Evaluation (RDT&E).

The need for the proposed action is to provide range capabilities for the training and equipping of combat-capable naval forces ready to deploy worldwide. In this regard, the VACAPES Range Complex furthers the Navy's execution of its Congressionally mandated roles and responsibilities under Title 10 U.S.C. § 5062.

WHAT IS PROPOSED?

The Navy proposes to:

- Maintain training and RDT&E operations at current levels if the No Action Alternative is selected.
- If either Alternative 1 or Alternative 2 is selected, then:
 - Increase or modify training and RDT&E operations from current levels as necessary in support of the Fleet Readiness Training Plan (FRTTP).
 - Accommodate mission requirements associated with force structure changes, including those resulting from the introduction of new platforms (aircraft and weapons systems).
 - Implement enhanced range complex capabilities.



WHAT WILL BE EVALUATED?

The Navy understands and recognizes training activities may have potential effects on the environment, as well as to the community and the stakeholders that rely on these resources. The Navy will analyze several alternatives to determine the effects of potential actions on natural, cultural and socioeconomic resources. Additionally, public input received during the scoping phase and DEIS public comment period will be carefully considered in the environmental analysis. Three alternatives have been identified and analyzed:

No Action Alternative: The No Action Alternative analyzes a variety of training and testing activities that currently occur within the VACAPES Range Complex. Under the No Action Alternative, training and testing operations would continue at current levels. No new or additional training and testing operations or infrastructure improvements would be implemented. Current operations include surge level operations consistent with the Fleet Readiness Training Plan.

Alternative 1 – No Action Alternative plus: increase operational training, expand warfare missions, accommodate force structure changes (including training resulting from the introduction of new platforms), and implement enhancements, to meet the components of the proposed action. This alternative is composed of all operations currently conducted under the No Action Alternative, with modifications to current training or introduction of new training. These would include:

- Using more commercial aircraft to serve as oppositional forces rather than using Navy aircraft for air-to-air missile exercise, surface-to-air gunnery exercises, air intercept control exercises, and detect-to-engage exercises;
- Incorporating anti-terrorism training into existing training events;
- Adjusting training levels to ensure that deployment can be stepped up quickly and at multiple locations in response to world events; and
- Conducting new or modified training associated with the introduction of the new MH-60 helicopter, and new organic mine countermeasure systems.



MH-60S Helicopter

Alternative 2 – Alternative 1 plus: certain additional increases in operations. It also includes implementation of additional enhancements to enable the range complex to meet foreseeable needs. This alternative is composed of all operations, force structure changes, and enhancements proposed for Alternative 1, along with the designation of a mine warfare training area in the lower Chesapeake Bay and along the Virginia coast to maximize mine warfare training value.



Smoke Floats or Flares Dropped for Targets

Under Alternative 2, the Navy also proposes to reduce the number of Bombing Exercises (BOMBEX) training events that involve dropping high-explosive (live) ordnance on targets at-sea. The at-sea target in these exercises is usually a flare or smoke float. Live BOMBEX events would be reduced to 5 events per year (1 event = 4 MK-83 bombs).



Explosive Ordnance Disposal Divers Train with Mines in the Range Complex

Public involvement is a fundamental part of the VACAPES Range Complex EIS/OEIS development and the Navy wants and appreciates your comments. The Navy has established several venues and informational resource areas for the public to learn more and provide input.

Comments on the Draft VACAPES Range Complex EIS/OEIS will be accepted via mail, fax, or the project Web site. All comments should be submitted no later than August 11, 2008 for consideration in the Final VACAPES Range Complex EIS/OEIS.

**THE NAVY
WANTS
YOUR
INPUT!**

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