

Action Plan

Date: February 12, 2001

Title: Wire Burning Initiative

Issue: Lack of regulatory and legislative support to eliminate or control this environmental problem.

Background/Status: For the past fifteen years or more, a significant number of wire burn/illegal metal recovery operations have been identified on lands administered by federal agencies in the California Desert. This illegal practice has also been identified in adjacent States of Arizona and Nevada as well as the States of New Mexico, Utah, and Colorado. These wire burn sites range from a "campfire" size to several acres in size. Evidence of these illegal operations is usually a dark gray to black ash material with pieces of wire or plastic covering nearby. The individuals illegally burning this wire are often convicted criminals or other people with a low income who salvage the copper core from the wire or from electrical transformers for resale to a metal recycler. In some cases, individuals have removed metallic target material, expended ordnance and their residue components from military reservations to process on nearby public lands. The State of Arizona virtually eliminated the problem in that state by enacting legislation to require a certificate of incineration and positive identification of the person(s) selling the burned wire.

Initial contact with the California Environmental Protection Agency (Cal EPA) - Department of Toxic Substance Control (DTSC) has indicated that in the past, DTSC would not support the proposed legislation initiative because DTSC did not feel that wire burns are a significant problem in California to warrant special legislation or regulations. Hazardous Materials Working Group Co-Chair John Key is working with representatives from DTSC (Kit Davis, Paul Baranich, Glenn Forman and Roger Vintze) to "educate" their agency on the problem and get their involvement. Lowell Jeffcoat from BLM's Yuma Field Office has provided case files and documentation on wire burn sites that his office worked on in Arizona and California.

Proposed Action: The action item will proposed the following: (1) that the DMG-HMWG solicit assistance from the state in passing the legislation to require a certificate of incineration for all burnt wire and positive identification of the seller of the burnt wire; (2) that the DMG host wire burn recognition training for field employees; this training would be open to the county Local Enforcement Agency (LEA's) personnel ;and (3) that the DMG-HMWG assist with the development of an information fact sheet about wire burns and wire burning for DTSC and the general public.

Contact: John Key, Hazardous Materials Working Group Co-Chair (909) 697-5383 [e.mail: John_Key@ca.blm.gov]