Operational Range Assessment
Laughlin Air Force Base

Air Force Operational Range Assessment Program July 2024

Background

DoD uses and manages operational ranges to support national security objectives and maintain the high state of operational readiness essential to its mission requirements. The Department conducts non-regulatory, proactive, and comprehensive operational range assessments (ORAs) to support the long-term sustainability of these ranges while protecting human health and the environment. The purpose of an ORA is to determine if there is a release or substantial threat of a release of munitions constituents (MC) from an operational range to an off-range area that exceeds an applicable regulatory standard or creates a potential unacceptable risk to human health or the environment.

The Department of the Air Force (DAF) Operational Range Assessment Program (ORAP), established to comply with DoD policy, sets forth procedures for consistently conducting ORAs throughout the DAF. The DAF ORAP assessment methodology uses an installation-wide approach to verify the ORAP inventory and accomplish range-specific assessments. The DAF ORA is comprised of two primary phases:

- A Qualitative Assessment, Phase 1, encompasses records review, interviews, and a visual survey.
- A Quantitative Assessment, Phase 2, encompasses records review, interviews, visual survey, and environmental media sampling, as required.

Installation Overview

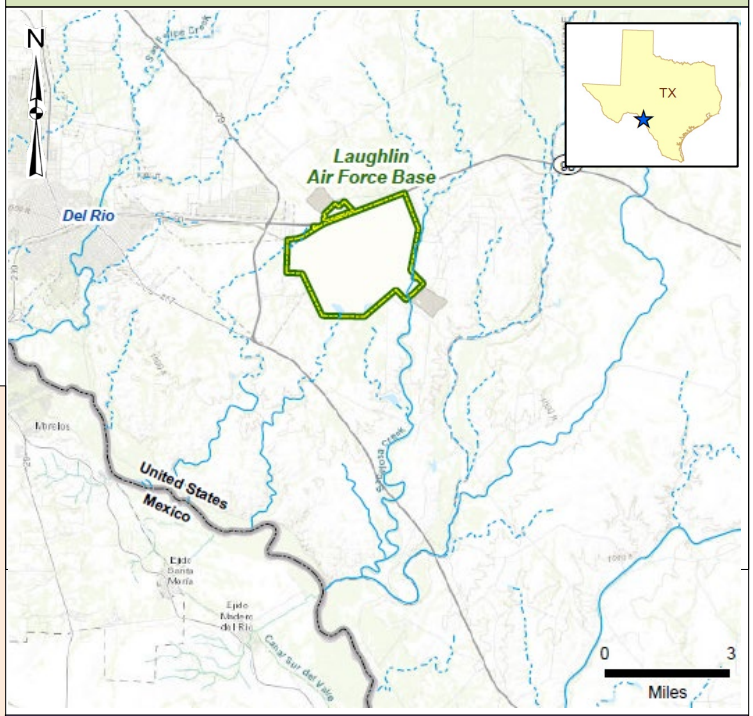
Laughlin AFB manages 4,695.41 acres of land in southwestern Texas with the main portion of the base encompassing 4,092.73 acres of land. The installation is located approximately seven miles east of Del Rio, Texas, and 17 miles southeast of the Lake Amistad Dam International Crossing.

ORAP Findings: July 2024 ORA Report

- Mechanism to potentially transport MC (metals) deemed unlikely.
- No actual or substantial threat of an off-range MC release exists for areas assessed.
- No unacceptable risks to human health or the environment were identified for areas assessed.

Next Steps

Laughlin AFB is scheduled to be assessed in accordance with DAF and DoD policy specifying periodic assessment at least every five years or sooner if significant changes occur that may impact assessment decisions.



Location of Installation

Installation Overview Continued

The base manages four geographically separated units (GSUs): Instrument Landing System, Next Generation Radar Site, Laughlin Auxiliary Airfield, and Lake Amistad Recreational Area. No munitions are expended on these GSUs, as such, they will not be further evaluated under the ORAP.

During implementation of the ORAP at Laughlin AFB two operational areas were determined to be eligible for assessment under the Program: the Ground Defense Training Area and Small Arms Range (SAR).

Several training areas were identified (Canine Training Area, Chemical Warfare Training Area, Combat Sills Training Area; and All-Terrain Vehicle Training Area); however, no use of munitions and/or deposition into the environment were confirmed and as such these areas were determined not to meet ORAP eligibility requirements. Additionally, a Skeet and Trap Range was identified; however, as use if solely for recreational purposes the area is programmatically excluded from the ORAP.

The following provides a range overview and summary of periodic assessment findings at the Ground Defense Training Area and the SAR. This is the second assessment of the Ground Defense Training Area and the third assessment of the SAR under the DAF ORAP.

Ground Defense Training Area Overview

The Ground Defense Training Area encompasses 3.46 acres and was first used for training in 1990. The area is used for shoot, move, communicate exercises as well as other training scenarios which utilize small caliber blanks and dye marker rounds. Following training exercises, most casings are collected, effectively removing potential source material.

Ground Defense Training Area Overview Continued

The 2017 initial Phase 1 ORA indicated limited MC (metals) may be deposited; however, all MC migration routes were deemed unlikely.

During the 2024 periodic Phase 1 ORA, a limited source of MC and no viable MC transport mechanisms were confirmed. As such, there is no threat of release nor risks to receptors.

SAR Assessment Overview

The SAR, a 25-meter partially contained outdoor range encompassing 4.43 acres of land. The SAR was constructed in 1962 for small arms training and has remained active since its construction. Expenditures at the SAR since 2008 have been limited to frangible munitions.

Prior Phase ORAs (2011 and 2017) identified a potential source of MC (metals) primarily within the earthen impact berm. During the 2017 Phase 2 ORA surface and subsurface soil sampling and subsequent modeling indicated it was unlikely for MC to impact underlying groundwater. No threat of release and no potential risks to off-range receptors were identified.

The 2024 periodic Phase 2 ORA continued to monitor MC levels through surface and subsurface soil sampling. Sampling confirmed a source of MC within the range floor and impact berm. However, modeling continued to reflect MC transport to groundwater unlikely. No viable MC migration mechanisms were identified. As such, there is no risks to off-range receptors. Continued monitoring of MC levels at the SAR was recommended.

For more information on this assessment or the Air Force Operational Range Assessment Program contact the Ranges Subject Matter Expert, Technical Branch, Environmental Quality Directorate, Air Force Civil Engineer Center
For more information on the DoD Operational Range Assessment Program visit https://denix.osd.mil/orap/home/