

**FINAL
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
THERMAL TEST FACILITY**

PROPOSED ACTION: The proposed action of this Environmental Assessment is to construct a new Thermal Test Facility to be located at the North Campus of the U.S. Army Soldier Systems Center in Natick, Massachusetts. The location of the proposed 11,000 square foot Thermal Test Facility is between Buildings Number 20 and Number 77 in the rectangular-shaped North Campus, located at SSC Natick's northernmost end adjacent to the South Pond of Lake Cochituate; the North Campus is approximately 11 acres in size. The campus consists of several warehouse and material storage buildings, a laboratory, communications building, and recreational fields. Much of the area between the buildings is paved. The paved area serves as a parking lot, and also functions as a traveled way for motorists. The proposed Thermal Test Facility footprint area is currently unoccupied by permanent structures, and is used by SSC Natick for intermittent, temporary storage of materials and assembling ISO containers for testing and deployment needs. There will be no net increase in impervious surfaces as a result of this project.

The purpose of the new facility is to help improve the protection provided to the soldier against battlefield thermal effects from flame/incendiary weapons, laser and the consolidation of other related research. This modern testing facility will offer all types of thermal testing at SSC Natick, the Army's Center of Excellence for development of clothing and protective equipment for the individual soldier. SSC Natick is responsible for development of the Armored Crew Gear, Helicopter Uniform, Air Crew Uniform, Combat Vehicle Crewman Uniform, and the Battle Dress Uniform. SSC Natick is also responsible for the Chemical Protective Suits and the Laser Protection Goggles used in Operation Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. The addition of a new thermal test facility at SSC Natick will ensure the safety of the individual soldier on the integrated battlefields of the future. All DOD agencies will benefit from the research developments created at the new thermal test facility.

Other alternatives considered in preparing the Environmental Assessment including continuation of the existing testing program at other facilities and with limited testing completed at SSC Natick. The testing at other facilities is considered to be unacceptable because of the high cost which has prevented SSC Natick's researchers from completing all desired testing for certain uniforms and protective ensembles for the troops, impacting material quality from defects and increased lag time between research efforts by as much as two years.

Cessation of soldier clothing and equipment testing is considered to be unacceptable as it would seriously impair SSC Natick's mission to make available the most protective uniform ensemble and support equipment possible. The cessation/no action alternative would greatly impair the national defense posture by reducing the protection provided to U.S. military personnel on the battlefield.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES AND MITIGATION MEASURES: Significant adverse effects to human health and the environment are unlikely to result from implementing the proposed action. Research to be done at the proposed facility will involve the testing of small quantities of materials necessary to ensure soldier clothing and equipment material qualities needed for U.S. Military battlefield personnel protection. The low quantity of test materials and a rooftop pollution prevention equipment unit will mitigate environmental impacts.

FACTORS CONSIDERED IN THE FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:

This Environmental Assessment analyzed the proposed action and associated impacts to area resources. The resources evaluated during the Environmental Assessment include land use, infrastructure (traffic and utilities), socioeconomics, public services, hazardous materials, noise, air quality and climate, geology and soils, water resources, biological resources, and cultural resources. Air dispersion model results indicate the TFT will operate within compliance with National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) according to the ESS report.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD COMPLETED: The Environmental Assessment and draft Finding of No Significant Impact (FNSI) were made available for a thirty day (30) public comment period. Included in an attachment to the EA is our responses to questions which primarily pertain to compliance with NAAQS, which we believe our air dispersion model results do not indicate any significant environmental impacts due to the low test quantities, i.e., six (6) pounds per trial, two trials per week, and materials having less than 1% plastic content. Also the roof-top smoke control unit will provide controls.

CONCLUSION: This Environmental Assessment concluded that construction of the new Thermal Test Facility is not expected to result in significant impacts to the environment.

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CHRISTOPHER S. CONNOLLY
GARRISON MANAGER

Date

Both the Final Environmental Assessment and this Final Finding of No Significant Impact can be viewed on the internet at <http://www.natick.army.mil/about/esho.htm>.

Copies of the Final Environmental Assessment and FNSI will be available for review at the Bacon Free Library, 58 Elliot Street (Route 16), South Natick, MA 01760-5596 and the Morse Institute Library, 14 East Central Street, Natick, MA 01760-4630. Copies may also be obtained by writing to Mr. Terence Garrahan, Environmental, Safety, & Health Office, 15 Kansas Street, Natick, MA 01760-5049.