

# BOEING SANTA SUSANA FIELD LABORATORY UPDATE

## The September 2005 Topanga Fire

In keeping with our commitment to the safety of our employees and neighbors, Boeing has prepared this update to provide information about the September 2005 fire at the Santa Susana Field Laboratory (SSFL). The Topanga fire started in the town of Chatsworth on Wednesday September 28<sup>th</sup> 2005 at 2:00 PM. SSFL employees were evacuated at approximately 3:00 PM. Security, Fire Protection and Site Services personnel remained onsite during the course of the fire. The fire first entered SSFL property at about 6:00 PM that night. Over the next 24 hours, the fire burned brush over about three quarters of the site, generally in the central and eastern portions of the site. During the afternoon of Friday, September 30<sup>th</sup>, the fire approached the western end of the SSFL and additional undeveloped land burned.

We are grateful for the hard work and dedication of many firefighters who fought the Topanga Fire. We are thankful that there were no injuries to the Security and Fire Protection crews battling the fire at the site.

Post-fire assessment shows that fire planning and prevention efforts have paid off at the SSFL. While brush burned on over 2000 acres of the site, ten of over 200 structures were damaged by fire and seven of them were destroyed. The affected buildings consisted of vacant and inactive structures and some operational facilities, including offices, shops and storage. Numerous telephone and power poles were also destroyed by the fire. Former U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) operational areas were unaffected and hazardous and radioactive materials storage facilities throughout the site remained safe and secure. Although power and water supplies were interrupted during the fire, municipal water and electricity have been restored at the site. The nearly 200 employees returned to the site as assessments were completed and services restored. Repairs to damaged structures are underway, while debris from destroyed structures was removed and properly disposed. Currently there is no estimate of the cost of damages or recovery. Efforts are underway to install erosion control measures.



*Helicopters loading water at the SSFL Helipad*

### ***Did the fire cause the release of hazardous materials at the site?***

All fires produce some toxic chemicals from the burning of brush and building materials. Based on our assessments to date, contaminants released onsite from the fire at the SSFL are limited to those typically created by burning brush, wood and building materials, as well as kerosene, machine oils, and lubricants. Additionally, untreated groundwater containing trace quantities of trichloroethylene (TCE) may have been released and likely evaporated.

### ***Could asbestos have been in those older buildings?***

Our records show that the older buildings did contain asbestos. To ensure the safety of employees and contractors returning to the site, we monitored the air for asbestos and for metals. Results to date have indicated no health risks to workers from these materials.

### ***Did the fire burn any areas where there is contamination?***

The fire did burn brush in many areas across the site. Because most of the chemical contamination in soil and groundwater at the SSFL is below the surface, it is unlikely that the fire released any of this contamination into the air. The extent to which contaminants concentrate in plants does not significantly increase the potential health risk over that produced by fire.

### ***What about radioactive contamination?***

The DOE's Energy Technology Engineering Center (ETEC), located at the western area of the Field Lab (known as Area IV), was used to conduct energy testing and research, including nuclear energy. Brush burned in Area IV, however sampling has shown that vegetation contains no radiological contamination. No structures in Area IV were affected by the fire. Areas where hazardous materials including radioactive waste are stored were inspected and verified to be secure and safe. Radiation exposure measurements taken around Area IV on Friday revealed safe, normal levels. Air sampling conducted on Wednesday and Friday during the fire and for several days following the fire has not shown any detectable radiological contamination.



*Fire damage at an inactive testing site*

### ***Which agencies are involved?***

Assessments of the damage caused by the fire were conducted in conjunction with the Ventura County Fire Department. Representatives of the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC), Department of Energy (DOE), California Department of Health Services (DHS), Ventura County Environmental Health Department (VCEHD) and the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board (LARWQCB) have been on site to inspect and assess the fire damage. Boeing is working closely with local, state and federal regulatory agencies to provide information, respond to questions and continue cleanup of the site.

### ***What's next?***

Boeing is working with both the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board (LARWQCB) and DTSC to institute best management practices (e.g., hydromulching, silt fences, covering soil areas with tarps and using sandbags) to decrease the amount of soil, ash and burned vegetation which could flow off site with the rainfall. However, even with these measures in place, it is likely that the levels of some chemicals in surface water, including dioxins and metals, will increase as a result of the fire. We will continue to monitor surface water, report our findings to the LARWQCB and post them on our website. Additionally, we will continue to work with the regulatory agencies to evaluate and implement interim and long term erosion control measures.



*Installing erosion barriers in Area IV*

**For more information, please call Boeing's Environmental Communications Office at 818-586-1393, or view our website at <http://www.boeing.com/defense-space/space/rdvne/she/>**