

NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION

NOTICE: 03WFF-02

National Environmental Policy Act; Finding of No Significant Impact

AGENCY: National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)

ACTION: AQM-37 Operations at the NASA, Goddard Space Flight Center's (GSFC)  
Wallops Flight Facility (WFF), Wallops Island, Virginia

SUMMARY: NASA proposes to operate AQM-37 targets at WFF and the Virginia Capes Operating Area (VACAPES OPAREA). Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321, et seq.); the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508); NASA policy and procedures (14 CFR Part 1216, Subpart 1216.3); and the Environmental Assessment (EA) for AQM-37 Operations at WFF (80.03.34.1876), NASA has determined a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) with respect to the operation of AQM-37 targets at WFF and the VACAPES OPAREA. Based on the analyses and evaluations in the EA, it is concluded that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

DATE: June 20, 2003

RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL:

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## SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION:

NASA has reviewed the EA prepared for the operation of AQM-37 targets at WFF and the Virginia Capes Operating Area (VACAPES OPAREA). NASA has concluded that the EA represents an accurate and adequate analysis of the scope and level of associated environmental impacts. NASA hereby incorporates the EA by reference in the FONSI. The EA included a review of applicable environmental statutes and regulations for the proposed action and concluded that the operation of AQM-37 targets is in complete compliance.

The WFF is proposing to make available for use by the U.S. Navy, the air launched drone target, AQM-37, at Wallops Island, Virginia. The AQM-37 would be used as a target for missile exercises conducted by the U.S. Navy and supported by WFF in the VACAPES OPAREA. The target would be used to test the performance of shipboard weapons systems as well as provide simulated real-world targets for ship defense training exercises. This would allow naval personnel to qualify to military standards for ship defense, and train for national defense. The purpose of using the AQM-37 as a simulated target is to provide a low-cost, more realistic threat simulation option for testing ship defense interceptor systems as well as providing a training target for operational units. Target tests are needed to validate system design performance and operational effectiveness of new and existing operational ship interceptor targets and sensor systems in order to counter both current and future threats. These threats cannot be completely represented by a single target system. The system requires a mix of various targets with different physical, electromagnetic, and flight characteristics. The AQM-37 would provide a unique threat profile that cannot be duplicated with other targets.

The EA discusses the environmental consequences of the proposed action along with mitigating efforts. Various environmental factors were identified that may be affected. These include the following resource areas: physical resources such as land resources, water resources, air quality, noise, and hazardous materials and hazardous waste; biological resources including vegetation, terrestrial wildlife, migratory birds, threatened and endangered species, marine mammals and fish; social and economic resources; and cumulative effects. NASA has identified no other issues of potential environmental concern.

Based on the EA for AQM-37 target operations at the WFF, and review of underlying reference documents, NASA has determined that the environmental impacts associated with the proposed action will not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the quality of the human and natural environment. Therefore, an EIS is not required.

NASA has solicited public and agency review and comment on the environmental impacts of the proposed action through:

1. A notice of availability of the draft EA concerning operation of AQM-37 targets at WFF published in the Eastern Shore News on April 30, 2003;
2. Consultations with local, state, and federal agencies; and
3. Direct mailing of the draft EA to interested parties. All environmental concerns raised during the 30-day public comment on the draft EA were assessed.

**Summary of Potential Environmental Impacts**

<b>Environmental Attribute</b>	<b>No-Action</b>	<b>Proposed Action</b>
Land Resources	No impacts	Insignificant impact due to minor possibility of surface soil contamination in the event of an aircraft mishap.
Water Resources	No impacts	Slight increase after monolithic impact due to the small amount of fuel, oxidizer and battery residues onboard the AQM-37. When target is destroyed during flight, no hazardous waste should reach the ocean. Consistent with the Virginia Coastal Resources Management Plan.
Air Quality	No impacts	Insignificant impact due to minor increase in vehicle and aircraft operations.
Noise	No impacts	Insignificant impact due to minor increase in number of aircraft takeoff and landings. Minor impact associated with the sonic boom from the targets flight.
Hazardous Materials and Waste	No impacts	No impact during normal operations. If there is an accidental spill or release of AQM-37 fuel or oxidizer, then hazardous waste would be generated.
Biological Resources	No impacts	No impact during normal operation. No significant impact to any other Threatened or Endangered species. WFF is not required to submit an application for the incidental take of marine mammals since the level of impact from WFF activities does not warrant a Letter of Authorization.
Population	No impacts	No impacts anticipated during normal operations.
Recreation	No impacts	Public Affairs Office would meet with tournament organizers, fishing clubs, and county officials prior to AQM-37 launch operations. U.S. Coast Guard would issue a Notice to Mariners and the Federal Aviation Administration would issue a Notice to Airmen.
Employment and Income	No impacts	No impacts
Health and Safety	No impacts	Slight increase due to the storage, assembly, loading, and possible disassembly of the AQM-37 targets.
Cultural Resources	No impacts	No impacts
Environmental Justice	No impacts	No impacts
Transportation	No impacts	No significant impacts. U.S. Coast Guard would issue a Notice to Mariners and the Federal Aviation Administration would issue a Notice to Airmen.
Cumulative Effects	No impacts	No impacts since oceanic mixing and dilution would occur more rapidly than target disintegration.

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY JOHN H. CAMPBELL

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