

Environment vs military operations

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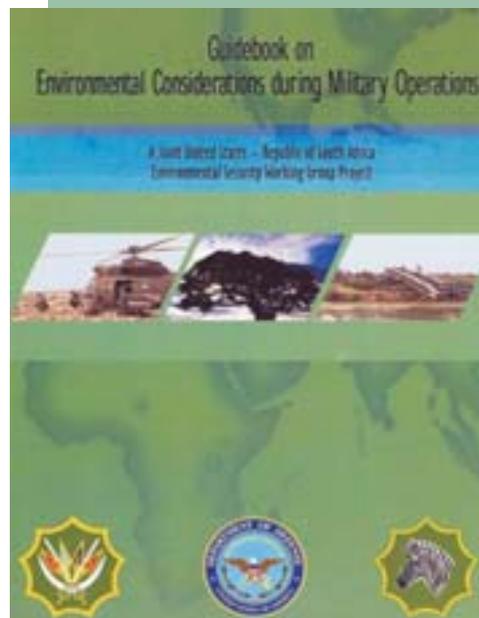
Military operations, by their very nature, can have major adverse impacts on the environment.

The Corporate Environmental Policy Statement for Defence commits the Department of Defence (DOD) to incorporating environmental considerations in the planning and execution of all its activities in order to mitigate any adverse impacts on the environment through a programme of continual improvement. According to the White Paper on Defence, the responsibility and accountability to ensure that "the planning and execution of military activities will take account of the environmental implications and not jeopardise the long-term potential of land and other natural resources" are directly transferred to the commanders of military units. This commitment and responsibility has now been formally addressed for military exercises and operations through the development of the Guidebook on Environmental Considerations during Military Operations. The contents of this guidebook were applied and tested during the deployment to the Comoros, where Lt Renier van Wyk from AFB Overberg was deployed as the environmental officer. In addition, during external deployments, a standard environmental article will be added to the Memorandum of Agreement that will allow for the incorporation of environmental issues in the planning of deployments, the deployment of an environmental officer and the mitigation of adverse environmental impacts.

The Environmental Considerations During Military Operations (ECOps) Guidebook was developed by a specialised team of experts from South

Africa and the US as a joint project of the Environmental Security Working Group (ESWG) under the auspices of the US/SA Defence Committee. It advocates the early integration of environmental considerations into deployment planning and implementation as critical. A commander can improve military performance and contribute to mission success by identifying potential risks to personnel, equipment and facilities and devising mitigating strategies, thereby reducing liabilities and costs. Where necessary, environmental impact assessments and rehabilitation measures must be undertaken and applied to counter, as far as possible, the negative impact of development, operations and other activities on the environment. Integration of ECOps will ensure that the environmental issues are not addressed as a separate agenda and environmental personnel are not considered as the enemy. The factor Environment will be formally appreciated during the operational planning process (OPP) in accordance with current military doctrine. ECOps can therefore be used as a tool to support informed decision-making during the OPP. It will assist commanders to comply with environmental and force protection requirements during all phases of an exercise or operation, both legally and financially. The guidebook contains guidance on general planning processes for military operations, typical functional areas and activities associated with military operations and identifies mitigating measures necessary to offset potential negative impacts on the environment.

A group of core environmental officers from the Logistics Agency, Services and bases received extensive



ECOps training during the annual Environmental Services Seminar that took place at the SA Air Force Gymnasium in Pretoria in September 2006. Additional practical training took place during EXERCISE SEBOKA at the SA Army Combat Training Centre in Lohattha in 26 October 2006, where environmental and operational members were afforded the opportunity to gain practical experience in the implementation of ECOps during the planning and execution of an exercise.

The principle of ECOps and its integration into military operations and exercises have been accepted by Chief Joint Operations and will in due course be included in military doctrine on warfare and promulgated as departmental environmental policy. Therefore ECOps and the factor Environment will also be included in the *curricula* and exercises presented to members on military development courses. **For more information on this interesting development, contact Maj Leoni Baird at tel no: (012) 339 5334 or Ms Adre Aggenbach at tel no: (012) 339 5316.** 