



Environmental Strategy of the Finnish Defence Forces 2025–2036

Photo: Pauli Vine / The Finnish Defence Forces





Photo: Nico Lensu / The Finnish Defence Forces

Contents

1	Introduction.....	3
2	External factors affecting the environmental protection of the Finnish Defence Forces	4
3	Environmental policy of the Defence Forces.....	6
4	Targets and actions.....	7
4.1	Realisation of the previous strategy.....	7
4.2	Targets 2036.....	8
4.3	Actions	9
4.3.1	Environmental responsibility and sustainability support the defence capability.....	9
4.3.2	Environmental risk management is proactive, efficient and systematic	10
4.3.3	National and international environmental cooperation is of high quality	12
5	Implementation	13

1 Introduction

In the current world situation, it is increasingly important to include the environmental responsibility of the Defence Forces in all activities, as both the deteriorated security situation and the environmental crisis advancing at a worrying pace put pressure on the Defence Forces' operations and its planning.

According to the Government Defence Report, environmental responsibility is integrated into all activities of the Defence Forces: the defence administration promotes carbon neutrality targets with respect to its own activities and takes into account the need to adapt to climate change and the energy transition in the planning of operations and building capabilities. The aforementioned actions will be implemented without compromising defence capability. Climate change has been mentioned as one of the factors affecting the operating environment of Finnish defence.

The environmental crisis and the security situation are strongly interlinked. They cannot be managed fully separated from each other. For example, climate change may weaken living conditions and exacerbate existing geopolitical tensions. The changes in the environment and, indirectly, in society require that the Finnish Defence Forces has ability to anticipate and adapt. The aim is to promote environmental responsibility in such a manner that it supports the defence capability.

Strongly internationalized activities also have a significant bearing on the field of environmental protection. Internationalization emphasizes the importance of environmental guidelines and common operating models.

The first Environmental Protection Strategy of the Finnish Defence Forces was published in 2011 (Environmental Protection Plan of the Defence Forces 2012–2025). This updated environmental strategy is the third update of the strategy and concerns the years 2025-2036. The target years correspond to the strategic planning period of the Finnish Defence Forces. The strategy defines the objectives of the Finnish Defence Forces' environmental protection and the means for achieving them. The environmental strategy and its objectives are also part of the Finnish Defence Forces' environmental system based on the ISO14001 standard.

The task of the environmental protection function of the Defence Forces is to ensure that the environmental obligations are met. Environmental protection includes noise management, management of soil and groundwater risks, management of air and water environment risks, safeguarding biodiversity and planning climate change mitigation measures. Environmental protection plays an important role in the development of waste management, chemical safety, sustainable development, adaptation to climate change and the energy transition, as well as procurement and material lifecycle management.

Environmental protection in the Defence Forces is the responsibility of not only experts and organizations but also of every individual.

2 External factors affecting the environmental protection of the Finnish Defence Forces

When the previous environmental strategy was published, we were living in the middle of the COVID-19 crisis. Since then, the COVID-19 crisis has subsided, and attention has turned to a deteriorated security situation. Russia began its war of aggression in Ukraine on 24 February 2022, which resulted in Finland joining NATO on 4 April 2023. NATO membership and the DCA agreement with the United States are milestones towards a strongly internationalizing scope of activities in national defence. The security situation and increased transnationality increase the volume of activities in Finland to some extent. This emphasizes the importance of having carefully prepared environmental guidelines. Transnational activities also mean common rules and commitment to jointly agreed operating models in environmental protection, such as NATO standards.

NATO has identified the need for cooperation to safeguard the environment and mitigate climate change. Climate change has also been identified as a threat multiplier. In 2021, NATO published the Climate Change and Security Action Plan. It also publishes an annual Report on Progress Achieved in the Implementation of NATO's Climate Change and Security Action Plan. In addition, NATO updates its Climate Change and Security Impact Assessment Report annually.

The accelerating environmental crisis puts pressure on, for example, emissions reductions and nature conservation. The EU's environmental, circular economy, emission reductions and energy transition targets have a direct and indirect impacts on the operations of the Defence Forces. Policies for halting biodiversity loss, such as the Nature Restoration Regulation and other conservation objectives,

should be considered during the strategy period. Other EU legislation projects to be considered include the Directive on Soil Monitoring and Resilience, amendments to chemicals regulations and the possible tightening of the health and environmental limit values for hazardous substances. Managing all the above external impacts requires foresight. The Defence Forces may need some exceptions to environmental protection regulations regarding, for instance, information security and raising readiness. Therefore, the Defence Forces must be actively involved in national legislative drafting. However, national defence does not exempt the Defence Forces from all environmental protection. As a responsible state operator, it has an obligation and will to play its part in mitigating the environmental crisis.

Climate change cannot be fully halted despite mitigation measures, so adaptation to the changing climate is at least as important.

As a result of climate change mitigation measures, we are living in the middle of an energy transition. Keeping up with the energy transition is essential to safeguard the defence capability in the future. It is not a change that will take place in the distant future that needs to be prepared for at the strategic level. Instead, it is a chain of events that we need to integrate into at the practical level already today. The energy transition is strongly influenced by political decisions and the economic situation, because of which the intensity and direction of development may vary. It is in the interest of the Defence Forces to be able to use any available forms of energy in all situations.

Technological development and digitalization have a strong impact on the change in the security environment, the energy transition and the mitigation of the environmental crisis. On one hand, they provide new methods and tools but, on the other hand, bring new challenges (e.g. cyber threats).

The population gravitating into growth centers and their expansion may cause pressure to plan residential areas closer to sites used by the Defence Forces in places where the Defence Forces' areas were originally located far from the

residential areas of cities. This may pose challenges in noise management in particular and pressure to utilize groundwater areas for the supply of drinking water.



Photo: Lovine Kabir / The Finnish Defence Forces

3 Environmental policy of the Defence Forces

One of the values of the Defence Forces is responsibility, which means that all operations of the Defence Forces are also conducted in an environmentally responsible manner without compromising defence capability. Environmental responsibility includes compliance with legislation, awareness of the environmental impacts of activities, prevention and minimization of environmental damage, and continuous improvement of environmental protection. The Defence Forces is also committed to NATO standards and principles in their activities.

Environmental responsibility is taken into account in all phases of operations and their planning in both normal and emergency conditions. Its key areas include energy efficiency and reducing energy consumption, reducing the clericalization of the environment, promoting sustainable development and the circular economy, maintaining biodiversity, minimizing environmental risks in firing and training areas, and utilizing technology and digitalization tools. Clear environmental responsibility planning, guidelines and operating models are used to reduce the harmful environmental impacts of operations and to ensure an efficient and timely response in exceptional situations, such as in the event of an accident or equipment failure. In addition, the Defence Forces proactively investigates the environmental impacts of its operations, assesses risks and implements risk management measures, and develops environmental technical solutions and sustainable operating methods.

Active cooperation with different stakeholders plays a key role in developing environmental responsibility. For example, the purpose of good cross-governmental cooperation is to find solutions that provide the Defence Forces

with high-quality means of action, while also considering the needs of the rest of society.

Support of the citizens is important for national defence. Good interactive relations with the surrounding society and, in particular, the neighbors of the areas administered by the Finnish Defence Forces create preconditions for securing the operating possibilities. In environmental protection matters, the foundation for trust is built through systematic and careful action.

The Finnish Defence Forces also takes environmental responsibility into consideration in its international activities. In Finland's highly internationalized operating environment, it follows high environmental protection standards and invests, among other things, in providing guidelines and support for foreign troops in environmental protection matters. In military crisis management and when providing international assistance, the Defence Forces aims to achieve the same level of environmental protection as in Finland and respect the principles of the legislation of the target country. In addition, the Defence Forces respects international agreements to protect the environment during armed conflicts.

Maintaining the defence capability prevents conflicts from arising, thus protecting human health, nature and the environment as a whole. Environmentally responsible operations contribute to ensuring sufficient operating conditions for the Defence Forces.

4 Targets and actions

4.1 Realization of the previous strategy

The previous environmental strategy defined the target state for 2032 and the means (25 pcs) for 2021–2032. The three targets set reflected the operating principles of the Defence Forces' environmental protection, but they need to be continuously developed. A separate implementation plan presented more detailed actions (88 pcs), which had been divided into short-term (2021–2024), medium-term (2025–2028) and long-term (2029–2032) actions. Short-term actions have already been implemented, but some are still in progress.

Actions taken include the introduction of an environmental management system, updating the internal environmental responsibility guidance, preparing environmental responsibility education material, determining the harmful substance content and noise emissions of ammunition, and updating noise zones in accordance with the Decree on Noise Levels Produced by Heavy Weapons and Explosives (903/2017). In addition, the Defence Forces has developed environmental protection operating models (e.g. management of contaminated sites and maintenance of the environmental protection structures of shooting ranges) and applied for environmental permits required for various functions. The Defence Forces has also developed their own expertise and cooperation nationally and internationally. The actions taken are described in more detail in the annual environmental report of the Finnish Defence Forces.



Photo: Vilho Oinonen / The Finnish Defence Forces

4.2 Targets 2036

Environmental responsibility and sustainability support the defence capability.

As the environmental crisis and the deteriorated security situation put more pressure on the Defence Forces, it is even more important than before to be able to coordinate the efforts for the benefit of the environment and national defence. This is supported by, for example, the environmental system, strategic planning, training and communications. Promoting ecologically sustainable procurement will ensure the Defence Forces' capabilities, security of supply and compatibility with the rest of society, as it proceeds in the green transition.

Environmental risk management is proactive, efficient and systematic.

The Defence Forces is well aware of the environmental impacts of its operations and continuously works to manage environmental risks and reduce harmful environmental impacts in an environmentally best available technique. Some of the work is carried out proactively by investing in research and development, ensuring that resources are used rationally and in a high-quality manner and utilizing the opportunities offered by digitalization.

National and international environmental cooperation is of high quality.

The Defence Forces plays an active role in the development of legislation and national environmental protection practices. It engages in national cooperation with its partners, the defence industry and authorities, taking comprehensive security and defence into account. In international cooperation, the Finnish Defence Forces shares its expertise and receives information on research and best practices from others. Cooperation with the EU, the Nordic countries and NATO (and other bilateral and multilateral cooperation) makes it possible to promote common issues, harmonize operating models and highlight our critical needs. The Defence Forces also carries out high-quality environmental management and cooperation in multinational exercises and operations.

The following chapter presents the actions and key tasks for these three targets. The tasks are described in more detail in the action plan, which specifies a timetable for them in the short, medium and long term, the responsible parties and the indicators for monitoring their implementation.

4.3 Actions

4.3.1 Environmental responsibility and sustainability support the defence capability.

4.3.1.1 Develop the environmental management system.

- Establish environmental management processes at all organizational levels.
- Draw up a programme for environmental protection research and development.

4.3.1.2 Develop the consideration of ecological sustainability in projects, procurement and lifecycle management.

- Develop ecologically sustainable procurement and implement an operating model for it.
- Develop consideration of environmental perspectives in projects.
- Examine the current situation regarding the use of circular economy methods and draw up a plan for developing it.

4.3.1.3 Make environmental data management more appropriate and systematic.

- Develop emission calculation.
- Develop usage monitoring and environmental monitoring.
- Develop the management of the situational picture of environmental damages.

4.3.1.4 Develop environmental expertise and general environmental knowledge in the Defence Forces.

- Review the processes and resources of environmental protection to identify development needs.
- Increase environmental responsibility teaching in personnel training.
- Develop cooperation between the defence branches in environmental matters.

4.3.1.5 Develop environmental responsibility in exercises and multinational activities.

- Develop environmental data for easier use and increased clarity.
- Develop environmental protection in exercises.
- Put into practice NATO's environmental standards and other international guidelines.
- Clarify and establish the roles and responsibilities of environmental protection in multinational activities.
- Specify the environmental guidelines for the use of allied troops.

4.3.1.6 Develop the environmental protection in emergency conditions.

- Develop support and guidelines for environmental protection in emergency conditions planning and participate in developing environmental protection legislation so that it supports raising preparedness. The progress made in developing measures to enhance environmental protection is not reported publicly.

4.3.2 Environmental risk management is proactive, efficient and systematic.

4.3.2.1 Develop and implement climate responsibility and energy efficiency measures.

- Update the Energy and Climate Programme in 2026 and implement actions in accordance with it.
- Develop energy management.

4.3.2.2 Continue to investigate and manage the environmental impacts of shooting activities.

- Maintain information on harmful substances in ammunition and develop its use.
- Continue and develop the investigation of the environmental impacts of harmful substances released in connection with shooting.

4.3.2.3 Implement soil and water protection in line with the principles of best feasible techniques and best practices.

- Renovate the water management structures of shooting ranges.
- Implement environmental protection measures for shooting and training areas in accordance with the overall development plan.
- Develop environmental protection at training sites for fire combat, CBRN protection and rescue operations.
- Develop risk assessment and classification of contaminated sites.

4.3.2.4 Develop restoration methods for contaminated soil.

- Develop remediation methods for soil containing explosive agents. Take advantage of international cooperation.
- Participate in national and international cooperation to develop cost-effective remediation methods for sites contaminated with PFAS compounds.

4.3.2.5 Maintain an operating model for taking natural values into account on sites under the Finnish Defence Forces' control.

- Acquire more detailed information on the significant natural values of sites.
- Specify the assessment of the impacts of the activities of the Finnish Defence Forces on natural values.

4.3.2.6 Improve the consideration of environmental protection requirements in chemical management.

- Investigate the presence of chemicals harmful to the environment in the Defence Forces' systems.
- Develop the management of environmental risks in chemicals storages and applications.

4.3.2.7 Investigate the environmental impacts of maritime activities and develop their management.

- Investigate the environmental impacts of underwater explosions.
- Investigate the environmental impacts of underwater noise.
- Continue the investigation of the environmental impacts of exercise activities at sea.
- Take account of environmental protection in the development of port operations.

4.3.2.8 Improve the management of the environmental impacts of military aviation and its support functions.

- Investigate the impacts of the F35 on noise areas and its other possible environmental impacts.
- Develop the management of runoff water at air base aprons in connection with other construction and renewal.

4.3.2.9 Reduce the amount and harmfulness of waste and enhance sorting.

- Develop the operating model of waste management.
- Develop waste management in exercises.
- Reduce food waste from field rations.

4.3.2.10 Make storage and maintenance operations more environmentally friendly.

- Develop the environmental risk assessment of explosive storage and production facilities.
- Implement washing facilities for vehicles and equipment in garrisons, and shooting and training areas.

4.3.3 National and international environmental cooperation is of high quality.**4.3.3.1 Make management of community relations more systematic.**

- Make reception, responding to and compiling statistics on shooting and aviation noise more systematic and uniform.

4.3.3.2 Activate environmental communications.

- Develop the planning of environmental communications.
- Communicate internally on environmental issues.

4.3.3.3 Develop international cooperation.

- Take a more systematic and goal-oriented approach to international cooperation in environmental protection and share responsibilities for participation.

5 Implementation

The environmental strategy is implemented and monitored as part of the Finnish Defence Forces' environmental system and the operational and resource planning and monitoring process. More specific tasks, responsibilities and timetables are specified in a separate implementation plan. The achievement of the objectives set out in the environmental strategy is reported in the operational and resource planning and monitoring process and in the environmental report of the Finnish Defence Forces.

The strategy and its implementation plan are updated in accordance with the environmental management system of the Finnish Defence Forces every four years.



Photo: The Finnish Defence Forces



The Finnish Defence Forces
puolustusvoimat.fi