President Bush is proposing to spend $8.1 million at the Army's Fort Leonard Wood in fiscal 2006 to finish the construction of a facility that would help train and protect soldiers in battle from explosives and land mines.

Bush also is proposing to spend an additional $1.9 million at the base for a new firing range.

The proposals were part of the budget request Bush sent to Congress on Monday, the first in a lengthy series of steps. Congress must debate the proposals and allocate funding for programs for the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1.

“This is the No. 1 engineering post in the nation, so that's where the countermine facility should be,” said Rep. Ike Skelton, D-Lexington. Skelton represents the 4th Congressional District, where the Pulaski County Army installation is located.

In fiscal 2005, Congress allocated $10.4 million to begin construction of the Counter Explosives Hazard Center, which also is supported by Republican Sen. Christopher “Kit” Bond.

“This new facility will save lives and reduce injuries by providing our soldiers with the finest training available to confront explosive hazards on the battlefield,” Bond said.

The second phase of the center would house a new training site, storage facilities and a kennel for 30 dogs trained to detect mines.

The firing range would be used to train Army personnel on how to use MK-19s, a type of grenade launcher.

Fort Leonard Wood is home to the U.S. Army Chemical School, which trains the military's emergency officials, both active duty and Reserve, to respond to chemical attacks that can cause mass destruction.

The National Guard's 7th Civil Support Team, one of 10 units in the nation that responds to chemical, biological and nuclear threats, also is located at the base. The team is on alert to respond to attacks in Missouri, Iowa, Kansas and Nebraska and can be activated by the governor or the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

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