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# Influence of MRE Education on Explosive Ordnance Disposal in Quang Tri

In collaboration with local and international organizations, Project RENEW is facilitating comprehensive mine risk education initiatives in Vietnam's Quang Tri province.

by Ngo Xuan Hien and Nguyen Thanh Phu [ Project RENEW / Norwegian People's Aid ]



Project RENEW's explosive ordnance disposal team leader takes notes from Le Thai Phien and Van Dinh Hoa, two ninth graders at Trieu Van School. The boys alerted Project RENEW to their discovery of four different locations littered with more than 500 items of wartime unexploded ordnance. The team spent seven days destroying the munitions. *All photos courtesy of Project RENEW.*

Since its establishment in 2001 as a cooperative effort between the government of Quang Tri province and international nongovernmental organizations, Project RENEW has made mine risk education (MRE) an integral part of its long-term mine action mission. Project RENEW aims to make Quang Tri a safe environment. However, since removing every bomb and landmine in Vietnam is impractical, priority is placed on removing cluster bombs, grenades, mortar and artillery rounds, and other small ordnance on the

ground or just under the surface, as these are the main items that kill and injure children, farmers and other adults.

Cleanup of wartime debris will likely continue for years. However, children and adults can practice safe behavior if educated about unexploded ordnance (UXO) risks and how to react when encountering explosive remnants of war (ERW) at home, in the garden or schoolyard, or by the road. To meet this challenge, Project RENEW, with support from Norwegian People's Aid, carried out the following MRE activities.



Secondary school children from Hai Lang district commune play an indoor game at the Mine Action Visitor Center while attending an MRE session. The activity is part of Project RENEW's MRE outreach to educate children in rural areas on UXO awareness and accident prevention. Project RENEW's data indicates that children make up one-third of the total UXO casualties in Quang Tri since the war ended in 1975.

### Community Reporting Network

In the third week of July 2014, two boys discovered and reported a cache of UXO in an acacia forest in a coastal area of Quang Tri province. The boys, Le Thai Phien and Van Dinh Hoa, discovered the munitions while looking for acacia seedlings for their parents to plant in the family garden. Having recently attended an MRE session conducted by the Youth Union in their village, they recognized their responsibility to report the ordnance to Project RENEW. The explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) team spent seven days removing and destroying a total of 530 pieces of UXO.

Le Thai Phien and Van Dinh Hoa participated in Project RENEW's integrated Community Reporting Network (CRN) in support of EOD operations, currently maintained in the four districts of Hải Lăng, Triệu Phong, Cam Lộ, and Đa Krông. CRN members, consisting of Youth Union officers, are

responsible for reinforcing UXO safety messages and encouraging the local population to report UXO sightings to Project RENEW's teams for timely and safe removal. Their reports notify an EOD team that responds immediately or within 72 hours in non-urgent situations. CRN has become an integral part of Project RENEW's MRE program and is an essential element of EOD team scheduling on a daily and weekly basis.

MRE is also provided to school-age children through extracurricular activities called safety days that include outdoor activities such as singing, role-playing, painting, games and competitions, leaflet distribution, and MRE puzzles. Students receive safe-behavior guidance, and take the messages and supporting materials home to share with family members and neighbors to educate them on safety when encountering UXO.



School children in Dakrong district receive MRE materials at a safety day event in their school, which helps reinforce their understanding about ERW risks and how to report sightings of deadly ordnance.

### MRE Tours Hosted at the Mine Action Visitor Center

Tours bring students from rural and mountainous areas in Quang Tri province to Project RENEW’s Mine Action Visitor Center (MAVC) with the option of also visiting either the Quang Tri Citadel or the Quang Tri Provincial Museum. Students have a chance to learn about Quang Tri’s war and peacetime histories as well as mine action work. Most importantly, they come to understand the need for safe behavior toward UXO dangers. At the end of each MAVC tour, the guide and accompanying CRN colleagues, teachers or Youth Union staff review and summarize the safety messages and practices for the students. These special outings enable children to explore the world beyond the classroom, encourage them to develop their artistic abilities and communication skills, and teach them how to protect themselves, their classmates and their families from UXO incidents.

### Community-based MRE

Traveling MRE shows (musicals, roleplay, dance, leaflets, survivor interviews) help disseminate MRE messages, particularly in communities with restricted education levels and information accessibility. These breaks in the normal schedule help rural community members relax from the labor and stress of a long day’s work. The traveling presentations provide entertainment but also create a comfortable

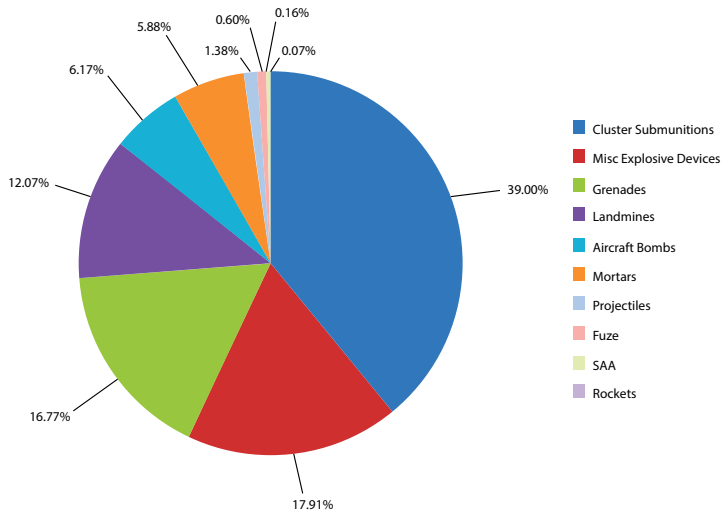


Figure 1. Statistics show that cluster bombs and grenades account for over fifty percent of the total UXO casualties in Quang Tri since 1975. Figure courtesy of Quang Tri Provincial Mine Action Database.

environment for learning safety messages. They also allow for UXO survivors to share their stories. The stories survivors share have a powerful impact on individuals who might otherwise pay less attention to UXO threats. The presentations encourage local residents to avoid touching suspicious items, be very cautious when farming, and report UXO sightings to demining organizations for timely removal.

### Child-to-Child MRE Traveling Troupe

Fifteen students between the ages of 14 to 17 audition for the opportunity to be members of the special entertainment troupe which provides child-to-child MRE. Participants learn UXO safety messages and how to disseminate them creatively and effectively. The troupe travels to remote villages to raise awareness of UXO dangers, and to promote safer behaviors among children and adults by performing humorous skits, stage plays, popular songs and dances. Through challenging MRE games and puzzles, the troupe creates a fun, engaging diversion for children while teaching them the dangers of UXO in a safe, comfortable atmosphere.

### TOMS® Shoes

In 2013, Project RENEW launched its TOMS® Shoes Giving Initiative thanks to a generous donation from the international company TOMS®. As part of its One for One® international giving campaign, for every pair of shoes purchased from TOMS®,



Project RENEW combines the excitement of shoe distribution with MRE messages for children, explaining the dangers of UXO and reinforcing the children's awareness of safe behavior.

the company will donate a pair of shoes to a child in need. Since 2013, Project RENEW distributed more than 100,000 pairs of shoes as part of its expansion of UXO safety messages to more than 245 schools in Quang Tri province. By integrating MRE sessions into the excitement of distribution events, Project RENEW not only gives each student a new pair of shoes but also educates thousands of children about the dangers of UXO and how to be safe from accidents and injury.

#### Impacts

Today, 185 Youth Union collaborators deliver safety messages and guidelines for safe behavior at the grassroots level. A team of village chiefs, who are part of CRN, support these Youth Union partners. They encourage all members of the community to be fully involved and to report life-saving information to EOD teams.

People living in Project RENEW's areas of operation are more aware of UXO dangers and know how to prevent UXO

accidents. By reporting UXO findings, locals protect themselves and their neighbors from being maimed or killed. From 2010 to 2014, the number of UXO discoveries reported by local persons to Project RENEW's teams for timely and safe removal increased from 92 to 433 (see Figure 2).

When Project RENEW launched in 2001, the previous casualty rate from bombs and landmines in Quang Tri province ranged from 76 to 165 fatalities and injuries every year.<sup>1</sup> In 2013, three accidents occurred: one death and three injuries were reported.

#### Challenges

Although UXO deaths and injuries decreased in the past five years, the most recent accidents were mainly related to scrap-metal scavenging. In 2014, Quang Tri province recorded six accidents that resulted in one death and 11 injuries. Five of the injuries occurred in an explosion at a scrapyards as workers loaded scrap material onto a truck.<sup>2</sup>

Sustaining public and school-based MRE campaigns is essential to reinforce awareness of UXO threats. UXO clean-up must continue for years to come in Quang Tri province. In the meantime, Quang Tri residents can be safe if they

understand how to protect themselves and their families from injury and death, and report munitions for safe removal and destruction. ©

See endnotes page 66

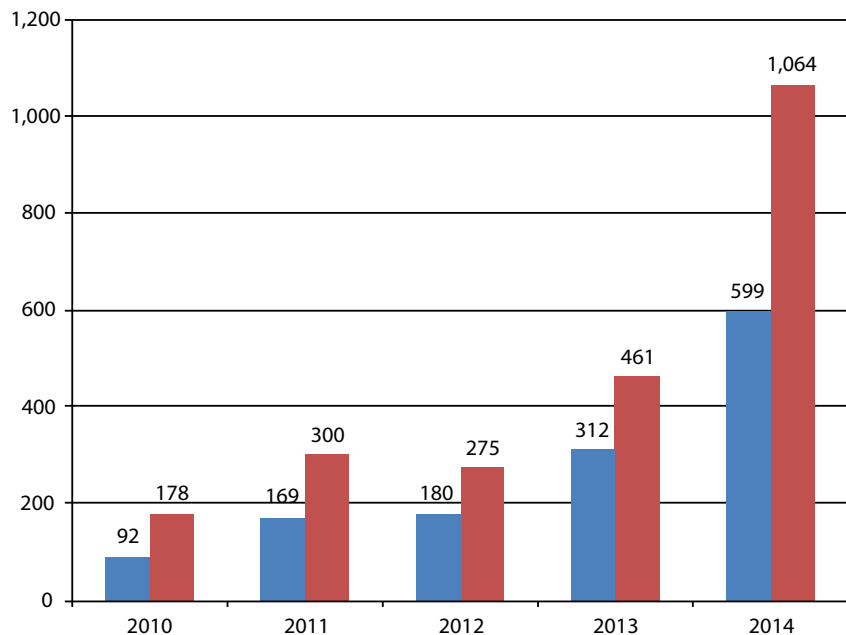


Figure 2. The number of UXO found and safely destroyed as a result of discoveries reported by local inhabitants to Project RENEW teams during 2010–2014. Blue = UXO discoveries. Red = UXO found and destroyed. Figure courtesy of Project RENEW.

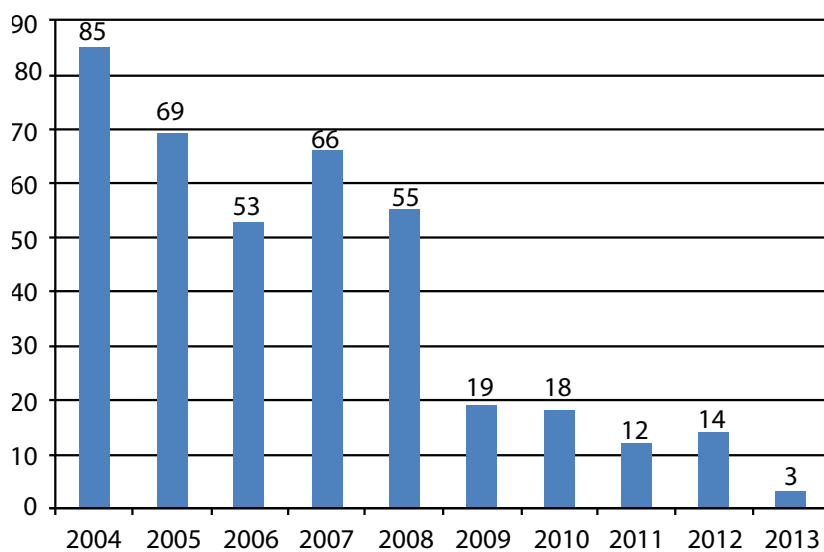


Figure 3. Number of UXO accidents from 2004 to 2013. Figure courtesy of Quang Tri Provincial Mine Action Database.



Ngo Xuan Hien is in charge of communications and development for Project RENEW. Hien provides the initial response to media and public inquiries about Project RENEW'S activities and acts as a primary point of contact for donors, government representatives and visitors. Hien's other tasks include conceptualizing and designing presentations and development proposals for fundraising and other activities. An English teacher for two years in Khe Sanh and then a specialist at the provincial Department of Home Affairs for eight years, Hien joined Project RENEW in June 2008. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in English from Hue University (Vietnam).

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Nguyen Thanh Phu, manager of the Mine Action Visitor Center, welcomes Vietnamese and foreign visitors and briefs them about the lingering impacts of the war. Phu also heads Project RENEW's MRE program. Before joining Project RENEW in July 2010, Phu worked as a licensed English-speaking tour guide for nearly four years and has a vast knowledge of former battlefields, areas of military operations, and other historical sites in and around the former demilitarized zone. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in English from Duy Tan University (Vietnam).

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