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Community Reporting Increases Safety in Quang Tri Province

by Ngo Xuan Hien and Dinh Ngoc Vu [[Project RENEW / NPA](#)] - [view pdf](#)

Established in 2001, Project RENEW—Restoring the Environment and Neutralizing the Effects of the War—develops and tests new ways of providing effective responses to the humanitarian challenge caused by explosive remnants of war. In accordance with international standards, the project embraces major pillars of mine action including surveys and assessments for the development of a mine action database, clearance, risk education, victim assistance and community development.

On the morning of 21 February 2012, residents of Trieu Long commune made two separate calls within hours of each other asking Project RENEW's—Restoring the Environment and Neutralizing the Effects of the War—clearance teams to remove unexploded ordnance discovered in close proximity to homes. Le Thi Kieu called Project RENEW's toll-free hotline from An Mo village to report a "long bomb" just under the surface of the soil that she found while gardening. Fortunately for Kieu, the hotline number is publicized on television, in leaflets and on billboards. Fearful of the danger, she immediately stopped working.

On the very same day, Do Van Thien was visiting his family's cemetery plot when he froze in fear: He saw UXO lying near his father's tomb. Knowing the danger that UXO could pose to him and others, Thien also called Project RENEW's hotline. Within hours of both calls, Project RENEW's Explosive Ordnance Disposal Quick Response Team responded by removing a rocket-propelled grenade from the woman's garden and an 82 mm mortar from the cemetery.

Pham Thi Thom, a mother of three children in An Tru village of Trieu Phong district in Quang Tri province, ran into a similar problem when she decided to sell her family's valuable Averrhoa carambola tree, which produces carambola, or starfruit. On 15 March 2012, her family was digging up the tree in their backyard when they unearthed five items of UXO at a depth of about half a meter (1.5 ft). They immediately stopped digging and called Project RENEW's EOD hotline number requesting assistance, as the UXO was only a few meters from their house. Less than an hour later, Project RENEW's EOD Quick Response



A Project RENEW team member counts the number of UXO removed from a resident's house before the UXO is transported to a demolition site for destruction.
Photo courtesy of Tran Van Quoc.

Team arrived and conducted a Non-technical Survey of the area. They uncovered 193 items of UXO including 60 mm and 82 mm mortars and rocket-propelled grenades. They safely removed the items from Thom's house and transported the UXO to their demolition site.

Community Reporting Network

The three neighbors, all residents of the same community, are participants in RENEW's integrated Mine/UXO Risk Education/Community Reporting Network. Implemented three years ago, the Community Reporting Network supports Project RENEW's EOD operations through the following actions:

- Finding and pinpointing ordnance location
- Identifying ordnance based on the description provided by locals who reported the ordnance and have received munitions risk education training
- Reporting ordnance immediately

This activates a response from the EOD team, which sets its priorities by the hour based on urgency and level of danger.

The system provides significant operational savings in time and money spent by reducing or eliminating false leads. These false leads and unknowns refer to the instances in which someone reported contamination due to suspicion or word of mouth alone. With the new system, information is verified before the EOD team is dispatched. Team members can target their response for optimum impact and immediate results—which are appreciated by the local population, who then spread the word to others, building the teams' credibility and reputation with locals. Community Reporting Network trains the local people on identifying UXO to prevent false leads.

Educating children and adults about risks—and mobilizing a quick response to sightings on Project RENEW's hotline—is a major step forward in reducing the number of UXO and eventually eliminating the threat. CRN has become an integral part of Project RENEW's MRE program and is an essential element of EOD operations.

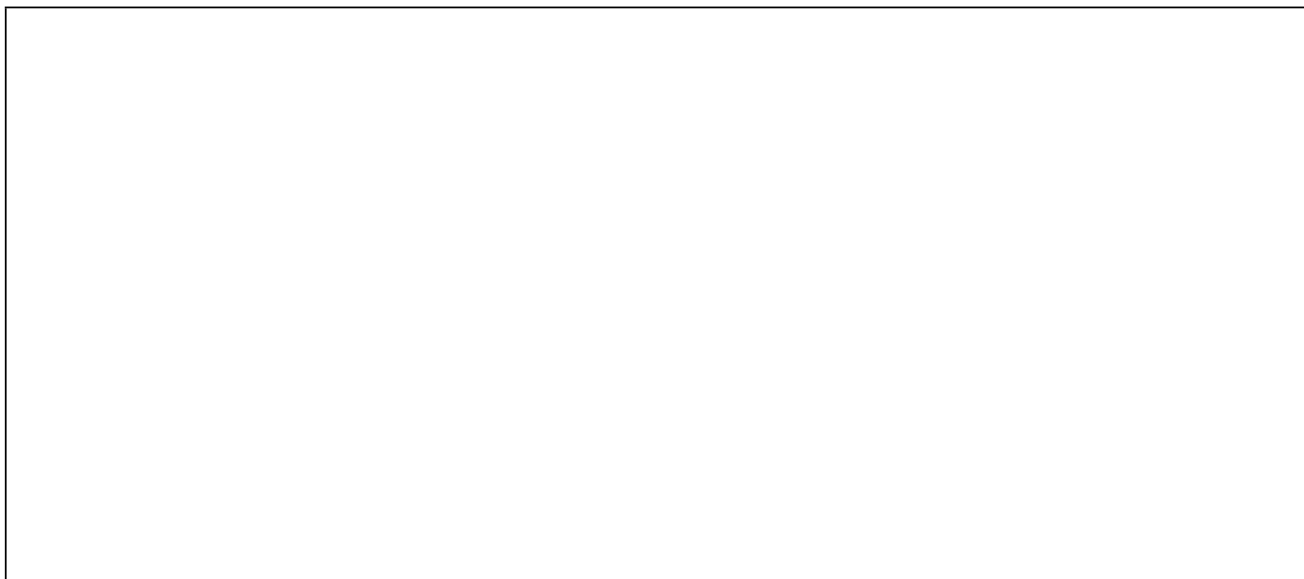
Current Developments

The effort is a collaboration among Project RENEW staff/EOD teams, Youth Union members at district and commune levels, and village chiefs who bring commitment to the network's mission.

Today, 320 trained CRN members generate expanded public awareness and deliver safety messages and guidelines at the grassroots level in four districts of Quang Tri province: Cam Lo, Da Krong, Hai Lang and Trieu Phong. The network is further supported by hundreds of other Youth Union members and educational staff who volunteer their time to educate children and adults about the risks associated with UXO and about the crucial importance of reporting what they find.

Since Project RENEW launched CRN in 2009 in the Cam Lo district and later expanded into three others, the UXO sightings reported to Project RENEW have increased significantly, resulting in the identification and safe removal of hundreds of items.

Figure 1 highlights the correlation between CRN input and EOD response and reveals the ultimate results. The chart shows a steady increase in the participation of the community in the reporting system, resulting in a higher number of UXO removed over the three-year period.



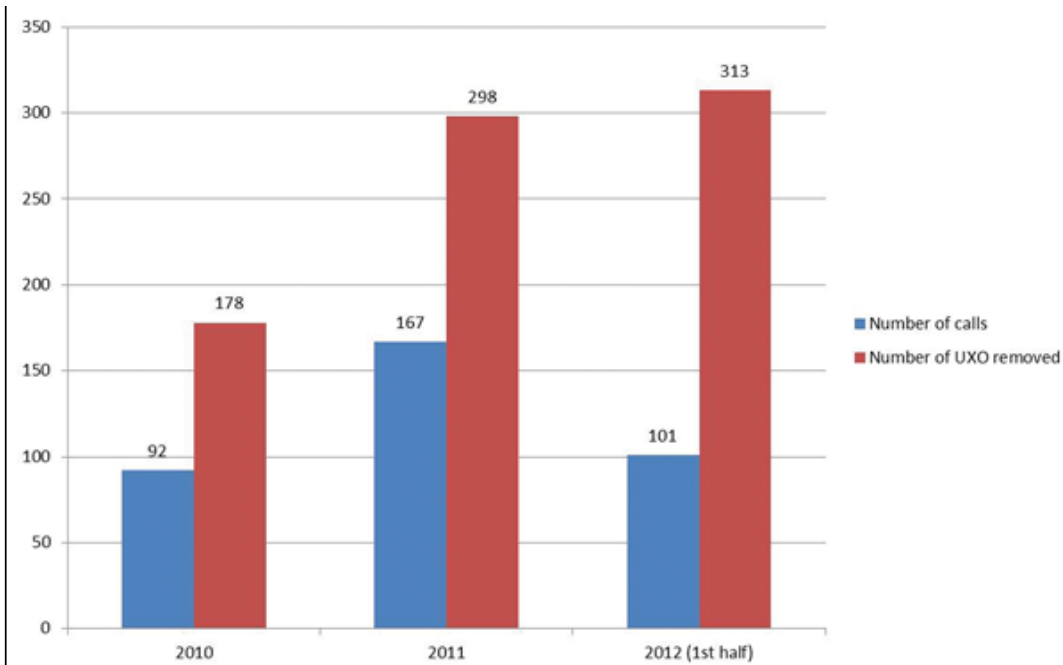


Figure 1. Number of reports of UXO and the number of UXO removed.
Figure courtesy of Project RENEW.

In the first six months of 2012, the number of discovered UXO unexpectedly increased: significantly higher than in the same period last year. A review of the records revealed that more UXO sightings were called in, and some of these calls led to hundreds of UXO being found and removed in individual tasks. Project RENEW's MRE program, in the four districts of operational focus, contributed to a reduction in UXO incidents from 29 in 2001 to three in 2011, as shown in Figure 2.

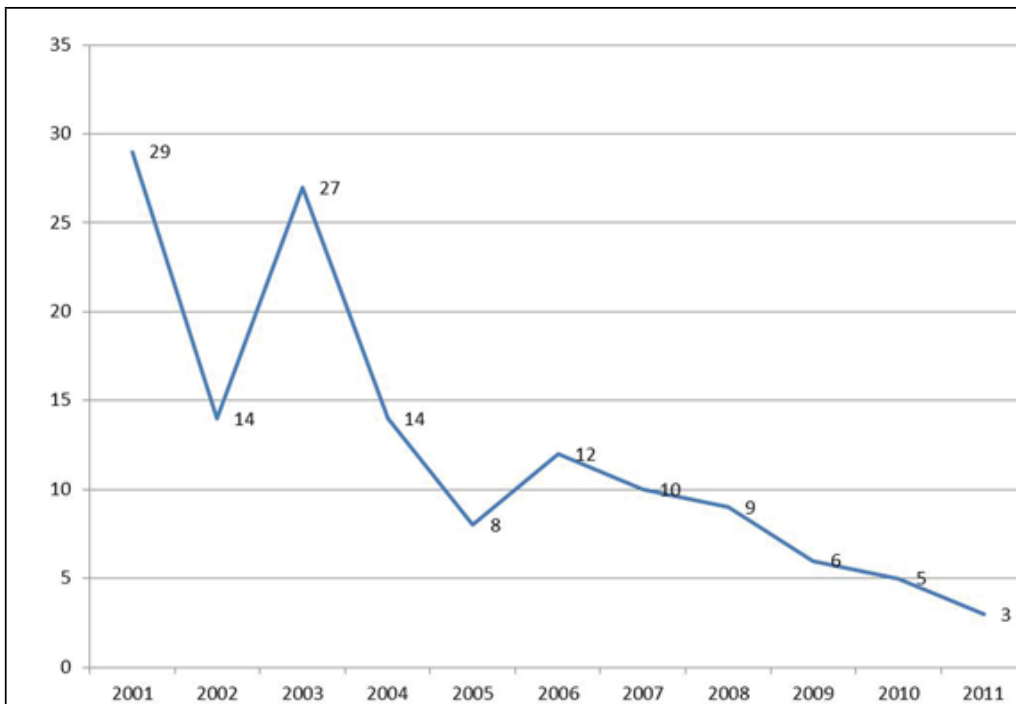


Figure 2. Reduction of the number of UXO accidents.
Figure courtesy of Project RENEW.

An Ongoing Challenge

As the most bombed and shelled area during the Vietnam War, Quang Tri province remains heavily contaminated with UXO even though the war ended more than 35 years ago.¹ A BOMICEN (Technology Centre for Bomb & Mine Disposal/Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation) survey confirmed that approximately 83 percent of the province's total land area was UXO-affected; the average impact nationwide is 21 percent. Since 1975, these explosive remnants of war have caused more than 7,000 casualties in Quang Tri province, including 2,635 deaths, of which 31 percent were children. Farming, tending cattle, collecting scrap metal and tampering with ERW are primary causes of UXO incidents.

People continue finding bombs from World War I and World War II in European countries, so removing every bomb and mine in Vietnam is a daunting and likely unachievable task. The real goal is making Vietnam safe, which means placing priority on removing the most visible, accessible and lethal ordnance: primarily cluster munitions and other items found on or just under the surface of the soil. MRE plays an integral role in educating children and adults who live with the threat of UXO, helping them learn how to live safely.

Being part of the solution to this problem is a challenge that has sparked the commitment and enthusiasm of people in their own neighborhoods. As part of Project RENEW's innovative approach of integrating CRN and EOD operations, local people feel they are contributing to reducing UXO risks and helping to minimize and eventually eliminate the danger, ensuring the safety of their families, neighbors and themselves.

Project RENEW's international partners have included the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Norwegian People's Aid, the Humpty Dumpty Institute, Golden West Humanitarian Foundation, the Tromsø Medical Center for Mine Victims, Vietnam Assistance Project and UNICEF. Funding from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs and the Taiwanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has supported the project.

Biographies



Ngo Xuan Hien has worked with Project RENEW since 2008 and is in charge of communications and development. He is responsible for presenting Project RENEW's mission and achievements to donors and supporters. Hien received a Bachelor of Science from Hue University of Sciences in Hue City, Vietnam and worked in the local government for 10 years before joining Project RENEW.



Dinh Ngoc Vu is operations manager of Project RENEW's Mine Action Program. He coordinates and monitors the Rapid Response EOD program and related development of the team in Quang Tri province. Vu earned a bachelor's degree in English from Hanoi University of Foreign Studies. From 2003 to 2007, Vu worked for MAG (Mines Advisory Group). He is also a graduate of the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery's 2012 Senior Managers' Course in ERW & Mine Action at James Madison University.

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Endnotes

1. The Vietnamese refer to this war as the American War. "Vietnam War: History." *BBC News* 2012. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/asia_pac/05/vietnam_war/html/introduction.stm. Accessed 8 October 2012.

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