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LANDMINE & UXO SAFETY: THE "DUTY OF CARE"

A long wheelbase Landcruiser can seat 13 people: five in the front and eight in the rear. Usually those sitting in the rear cannot use seat belts because there are none, and those in front often choose not to wear them. Besides, at the end of the world, as the Portuguese called the southeastern corner of Angola, it is very unlikely you will meet another car anyway, so why wear seat belts?

One day, a Landcruiser full of aid workers hit an anti-tank mine in Kuando Kubango province, killing seven and injuring six of the passengers. In such instances, the enormous blast catapults the person against the car body or out of the vehicle. The car itself gets thrown up in the air, leading to a heavy impact for the passengers upon landing. If the passengers had been wearing seatbelts, it is possible that more may have survived the accident. The road had been safely used for some time prior to this incident; however, it was the start of the rainy season and the wet weather made it difficult for the driver to stay on well-used tracks. Most likely, the vehicle hit the anti-tank mine because it drove away from the safety of the tracks.

After this incident, the United Nations in Angola closed the road for its staff and conducted an investigation. Results of the investigation showed that although the road was in regular use, Angolan engineers had conducted only limited clearance without proper equipment. As a consequence of this incident, sev-

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eral roads in the country had to be closed by the United Nations and food aid airlifted.[1]

Are incidents like this preventable? Safety trainings operate within a discourse of risk and its management. From this stance, such incidents can be prevented or ameliorated, or at least their lethality reduced. Following safety rules—for example, wearing seat belts, avoiding suspected mined roads during the rainy season, driving in well-marked tracks and having the most up-to-date mine information—may prevent or at least mitigate, the effects of mine strikes such as this.

Mindful of the increasing numbers of humanitarian workers engaged in complex emergencies and working in mine-polluted countries, the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) took the lead in developing the Landmine and Unexploded Ordnance Safety Project (LSP). Launched in 2000, the LSP aims to provide systematic landmine safety briefings to service providers—principally aid workers from the United Nations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The project has produced positive results, good training materials and a pool of LSP-trainers, but the potential of the LSP to prevent accidents has not yet been fully realised.

Under the concept of duty of care, landmine safety should become an integral part of the occupational health and safety policy of institutions working in mine-polluted countries. We believe that landmine safety can play a substantial role in helping to protect United Nations, government and non-government staff. Further, we feel that it can also contribute to conventional mine risk education (MRE) interventions by raising awareness of the responsibilities service providers have towards their clients with regard to mine and UXO safety. Landmine and UXO safety briefings should become a standard ingredient of any mine action programme.

Site of a mine accident involving a vehicle that resulted in seven dead and six injured in Angola.

LANDMINE AND UXO SAFETY

Learning how to protect oneself in a mine-contaminated environment is the responsibility of each individual working in mine-affected areas. It should be part of normal pre-deployment procedures of informing and preparing oneself for a new assignment. This responsibility however, is not restricted to individual employees. Employers also have a responsibility to ensure that their staff members have the knowledge, skills and appropriate institutional support to protect themselves. This duty of care extends to UN organizations, NGOs, governments, the media and commercial enterprises with staff working in dangerous areas.

The concept of duty of care includes providing staff with regular and systematic landmine safety briefings alongside establishing mine-protective policies and regulations. This should include providing appropriate technology to mitigate the effects of an incident; for example, adequate communication means and vehicle safety equipment are good ways to avoid accidents on the field. To enable organizations to better fulfill this responsibility, the UNMAS, with other UN agencies and mine action NGOs jointly developed the *Landmine & UXO Safety Handbook* and accompanying training materials. The handbook, based on an initial version developed by CARE in 1997, has been translated into Arabic, Dari/Farsi, French, Pashtu, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish with over 70,000 copies distributed worldwide. A landmine and UXO safety briefing, including practical training, should supplement these print materials.

The primary target group of LSP has been humanitarian workers deployed in mine-contaminated countries. The content of the briefings is similar to standard mine risk reduction messages and includes what to do in a minefield (either if in a vehicle or on foot) as well as standard procedures in the event of another person or persons having a mine incident. Additional messages aimed specifically at this target group focus on organizational safety procedures.

A REVIEW OF LSP TO DATE

In the second half of 2003, UNMAS undertook an internal review in 20 of the 27 countries in which the LSP was being implemented. The review aimed to evaluate whether the project had been implemented as intended and to inform further development of the LSP. Four broad areas were looked at: training materials, outreach via training of trainer (ToT) workshops, trainer's background and institutional commitment.

Materials

The landmine and UXO handbook is a small, pocket-size booklet that provides safety advice both to the individual and to the organizations. Since the handbook is designed to be generic, country-specific leaflets have also been produced to provide the necessary local details. Trainers receive a set of training aids including detailed trainer's notes, a PowerPoint presentation and Mined Area Indicator Images. Also a specific, 20-minute instructional movie was shot. Most materials have been translated into Arabic, French, Portuguese and Russian—the video, for example, has been subtitled.

Outreach

ToT workshops were central to the original design of the LSP, and between 2000 and 2003, approximately 230 people from 27 countries participated in 14 ToT workshops. The following countries/areas sent participants: Afghanistan, Angola, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burundi, Cambodia, Chad, Chechnya (Russian Federation), Croatia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, Kosovo (Serbia and Montenegro), Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Mozambique, Myanmar, Somalia, Sudan, Tajikistan, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Western Sahara (Morocco).

Trainer's Background

The review found that although the reach of the workshops was satisfactory, safety briefings were mainly in-house and not necessarily part of the institutional culture of staff safety. Contrary to the original concept of having laypeople teach laypeople, most of the trainers who started giving briefings after having received the ToT course were engaged either in mine action or security. One of the reasons for this was that while the ToT prepared trainers to deliver landmine safety briefings using the materials provided, laypeople did not feel they had the additional knowledge or experience to respond to the broader mine-related issues that were often raised. Security officers and mine action practitioners, on the other hand, felt better able to respond to these issues.

Institutional Commitment

The review also pointed out that strong management support and commitment are essential to make LSP as successful as intended. Only a few managers or supervisors who sent staff on LSP ToT courses ensured that these people then trained others. A positive sign, however, is that international agencies increasingly integrate the LSP into their staff safety and training policy. The Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator (UNSECOORD) and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), the World Food Programme (WFP) as well as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Handicap International (France) have either fully adopted the LSP as their main reference tool or have adapted it into existing training resources. UNSECOORD now provides mandatory landmine safety briefings to all incoming staff. UNSECOORD and DPKO staff members receive both pre-deployment training and in-house briefings. Initial trainings are based on the LSP-module with additional specific in-country briefings. Regular refresher trainings are also provided, especially in areas deemed to be high-risk.

Prior to entry in to Iraq, both the ICRC and the WFP provided LSP training to their staff, and later on the ground, the United Nations Mine Action Team gave regular briefings to newcomers.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Based on the UNMAS review, a number of challenges and opportunities have been identified for the next phase of the LSP if the project is to achieve its goal of delivering systematic, well-promoted landmine safety briefings to the service provider industry. Challenges include securing institutional and management commitment, identifying the right trainers and LSP briefers, developing appropriate messages, and monitoring and evaluating outcomes. Opportunities include reinforcing LSP as part of security briefings, integrating LSP with MRE, broadening the target group and developing new resources.

Gaining Institutional Commitment

In worksite health promotion and injury prevention programs, management support and commitment have been found to be key. This includes not only management support to educational campaigns, but also a demonstrated commitment to improving workplace safety through environmental, technological and regulatory efforts.[2] In the case of landmine safety, for example, this could include the provision and maintenance of both front and rear safety belts with a mandatory requirement for staff to wear them; providing drivers with regular and systematic breaks so that they do not become overtired and thus less alert; giving staff regular mine updates; and developing policies and standard operating procedures that facilitate safe mine behavior. It would also involve the provision of first aid kits and training along with adequate evacuation policies. On an educational level, landmine safety briefings could be made obligatory before deployment, while in-country and prior to travel to high-risk zones.

While the LSP materials do provide organizations with guidance on what they can do, the training has focused primarily on individuals with limited institutional follow up. In the future, the LSP will try to engage with a wider range of actors including organizational policy-makers and program managers, as well as individuals to promote safe technological and procedural practices.

Monitoring and Evaluation

A key challenge for the LSP, as with its sister MRE, is developing an effective monitoring and evaluation framework that measures outputs and establishes causal pathways between intervention and outcomes. The first step will be a needs assessment to identify individual and organizational risk factors. This could be done by sampling a number of organizations and individuals within the target group to understand the risk, and to identify, for example, the number of organizations that provide safety belts for all passengers, the number of organizations that use route cards, etc., and by looking at individual behaviors and knowledge. This assessment should help the LSP to analyze risk behaviors and associated risk factors and to describe its client group more clearly. It should also help to redefine its activities, objectives and theory of action, making it possible to develop interim or proxy outcome indicators for ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

Choosing the Right Trainers

Trainers should have some background in mine action or security issues to enable them to respond to the broad array of concerns that naturally arise in a landmine safety briefing. Preferably, trainers will also have a background in training or facilitation. Particularly important is the ability to not only provide correct information, but also to check that the information has been received as intended.

Developing Appropriate Messages

As with MRE, developing appropriate landmine safety messages including the actual appeals, words and visuals used to get the ideas across is being given serious consideration in the next phase of the project. Some briefings in the past have been found to have a high technical load, which is not necessarily relevant to the audience, or to the aims of the LSP.

Fear appeals such as the use of graphic pictures of the dead and injured have also been used with the idea of shocking people into safe behavior. Evidence from field promotion, however, suggests that while mild fear can arouse interest, create concern and lead to positive change, too much fear can lead to people denying and rejecting the message. In Britain, for example, fear appeals used in smoking and drunk driving were found to have little effect as people built up barriers of beliefs to deny the message and justify their behaviors.[3]

Another message under review is the emphasis placed on recognizing local and international mine signs. In many cases, mine signs have either been removed or were simply not there in the first place. An important message in south Sudan, for example, is that mined areas are rarely, if ever, marked.

Opportunities: Integrating LSP Into Mine Action

Currently, while some mine action practitioners have been involved in the LSP, it is often not an integral ingredient of mine action. Yet mine action practitioners have the necessary skills, knowledge and credibility to disseminate landmine safety messages. Further, by helping service providers protect themselves, we can also help them to protect their clients—thus all service providers can become partners in helping to prevent landmine/UXO injury.

Security officers are a second group well placed to deliver landmine safety briefings—as an important and integral part of their job description. Specifically including landmine safety in their job descriptions helps to institutionalize it and ensure it is covered adequately. Alternatively, in a country with a mine action center or an equivalent that provides landmine safety briefings, security officers could refer their clients to the center.

Broadening Target Group

To date, the LSP has targeted mainly international personnel. Opportunities exist, however, to broaden the client group to include government and non-government workers as well as commercial workers. MRE personnel could be proactive in diversifying their client group, actively canvassing clients and offering LSP briefings. This approach will also provide opportunities for non-mine action practitioners to expand their role and responsibility in preventing mine injuries. Although not an explicit aim of the project, providing service providers with safety messages may also increase the reach of MRE messages within traditional MRE target groups. In many rural communities, for example, people from the outside, such as bus drivers, traders and indigenous NGO staff members are seen as credible sources of information.

New Resources

In the next phase of the project, a new interactive CD-ROM is being produced in partnership with the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) Center for International Emergency Medicine. A major advantage of the CD-ROM is its ability to be easily customized according to local needs and issues. The CD-ROM will have a range of materials targeting national and international staff, technical specialists and administrators. The teaching components will comprise a storyline and case scenarios and will incorporate existing and new materials through a variety of media tools.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the LSP is designed to enable employers to fulfill their duty of care and provide individuals and institutions working in hazardous environments with the skills and knowledge to take preventative action. The UNMAS review showed that although the project did produce good results, with more and more people employed in mine contaminated countries, the need for the project is great.

To conclude, we have argued that the importance of preventing mine/UXO casualties extends beyond individuals. In mine-infested countries, employers also have a duty of care to ensure that landmine safety receives serious and continuous attention. This includes providing staff with the necessary skills and knowledge to develop safe habits and take protective action. It also includes ensuring that the workplace supports such action.

We have also suggested that mine action practitioners have a responsibility both to staff working in hazardous areas and to their clients to actively promote and deliver LSP. Returning to Angola: can wearing seat belts, for example, save you from such an enormous blast of an anti-tank mine? It may, if you are lucky. In a nearby incident, two staff members were driving down a similar dirt road and their vehicle hit an anti-tank mine—they were wearing seat belts and both survived.

* *Photos c/o author.*

Endnotes

1. Following an investigation, roads only remain closed if a mine was activated in the traveled area of the road; if the investigation finds the device was activated to the side of the road, the road is re-opened.
2. Bonnie, R.J. and Guyer, B. (2002) "Injury as a Field of Public Health: Achievements and Controversies," *The Journal of Law, Medicine and Ethics*, Summer 2002; 30–2.
3. Hubley, J. (1993) *Communicating Health: An Action Guide to Health Education and Health Promotion*, Macmillan, London.

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1. Haddon, W. Jnr (1980) "Advances in Epidemiology of Injury as a Basis for Public Policy," *Public Health Reports* 1980; 95:5, 411–421.

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