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Josip Ćerina

Croatian Mine Action Centre

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The Role of Croatian Media in Mine-risk Education

In its work, the Croatian Mine Action Centre (CROMAC) has found that various forms of media, from new Internet applications to newspapers and the radio, are uniquely situated to raise awareness among at-risk populations about the realities of landmines. To examine the media's effectiveness in mine-risk education, in 2008, CROMAC completed a study evaluating the Croatian media's coverage of landmine incidents and related news. With cooperation, CROMAC hopes better reporting about MRE programs will prevent mine accidents and create a more informed population.

by Josip Ćerina [Croatian Mine Action Centre]

Landmine contamination in Croatia is a result of mass landmine use during World War II (1941–1945) and the Homeland War (1991–1995). Between 1991 and 2011, 1,329 mine incidents occurred in Croatia resulting in approximately 1,912 casualties. Since the establishment of the Croatian Mine Action Centre in 1998, the number of incidents has steadily decreased over the years to fewer than 10 incidents per year. From 2008 to 2010, six mine incidents each year occurred (a total of nine killed and 12 injured), and in 2011, five incidents occurred (zero killed/four injured). From 2005 to 2007, a total of 37 mine incidents resulted in eight deaths and 24 injuries, and from 2002 to 2004, 47 incidents resulted in 21 deaths and 30 injuries.¹ (See Table 1 for details.)

Various activities such as massive clearance efforts funded by the Croatian Government and by some foreign governments and private donors contributed to the reduction of mines in Croatia, including conducting mine-risk education and marking mine-suspected areas with hazard signs. The media has also contributed greatly to this reduction. During a study published in *Medijska istraživanja* in 2009, CROMAC found that the "media is a very important CROMAC partner in the implementation of different programs as well as distributing educative and preventive messages."²

Bearing in mind that mine action's purpose is not only demining but also reduction of mine danger, this article elaborates on the role that the media plays in the process of solving the mine problem. Taking into account recent Croatian media practices, CROMAC investigated how extensively the media covers mine action-related topics and analyzed the effects of incomplete reporting that fails to educate or teach preventive behavior. This research allowed CROMAC to begin to understand more efficient solutions for MRE delivery and other mine-related information.

Mine incidents involving civilians following the Homeland War show the need for systematic communication regarding risks. Endangered communities require safe-behavior training and warning about the risks that mines and explosive remnants of war impose. This is especially important in the Croatia's rural areas, where inhabitants live and engage in agriculture and farming near mine-suspected areas. According to the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining's *A Guide to Mine Action*, four categories of persons suffer from mine incidents:

1. Unaware: The person is not aware of mine danger.
2. Uninformed: The person is informed about mines but is not aware of safe forms of behavior.
3. Inconsiderate: The person knows about and ignores the safe forms of behavior.
4. Deliberate: The person, generally without many options available, deliberately accepts unsafe behavior.³

Due to Croatia's persistent landmine and ERW contamination, continuing mine-awareness activities and promoting behavior change is necessary.⁴ Croatia uses radio, television and newspapers, along with signposts marking hazardous areas, to spread warnings and raise public awareness about risks and safe behaviors.

In addition, recent technological developments enable communication over the Internet. CROMAC website's MISportal, launched in February 2009, allows users to obtain comprehensive information about mine-suspected areas in Croatia by selecting a desired location.⁵ MISportal also details the method of marking contaminated areas.

Although media coverage helps prevent landmine incidents, until mined areas are finally cleared, the most important form of prevention from mine incidents is the mine-warning sign. Each year, CROMAC regularly checks the conditions of

Year	No. of accidents	Minor bodily injuries	Fatal incidents	Major bodily injuries	Total
1991	190	43	48	162	253
1992	235	48	67	196	311
1993	183	42	67	162	271
1994	110	36	37	102	175
1995	205	27	93	214	334
1996	100	23	35	75	133
1997	75	20	43	63	126
1998	62	21	36	35	92
1999	34	9	21	27	57
2000	17	5	10	8	23
2001	21	7	8	14	29
2002	24	9	6	11	26
2003	10	4	1	4	9
2004	13	0	14	2	16
2005	10	0	4	9	13
2006	10	6	1	4	11
2007	7	1	3	4	8
2008	6	1	2	4	7
2009	6	1	4	2	7
2010	6	3	3	1	7
2011	5	2	0	2	4
1998-2011	231	69	113	127	309
Total	1,329	308	503	1,101	1,912

Table 1. Number of mine incidents and casualties in Croatia.

all mine-warning signs, placing special emphasis on checking in the spring (after winter weather has damaged or destroyed some signs) and when rural activities intensify. Currently, Croatia has 16,000 mine-warning signs. CROMAC makes and updates mine-situation maps for all endangered communities, also updating its online MISportal.⁶ In addition, representatives of local communities and individuals can freely ask CROMAC to update and verify the marking status of mine-suspected areas. This form of two-way communication is important for maintaining a high level of marking accuracy.

Keeping the population informed also includes providing the location and scope of contaminated areas and mine-action activities undertaken so far. This information is necessary for citizens to take an active part in adopting priority plans. Municipalities and towns file requests for drafting county-priority lists. The priority list serves as the basis for the annual demining plan.⁷ Cooperation with the local community often contributes to faster socioeconomic development, especially regarding agriculture and farming, upon completion of demining operations.

Research Methodology

While CROMAC's MISportal helps combat sporadic media coverage of landmines, and serves as a platform for information exchange about the extent of mine dangers, additional and ongoing media coverage could also effectively raise mine awareness among individuals and local communities. If journalists act responsibly, newspapers could be an efficient medium, because they provide opportunities for more detailed coverage of a particular topic or event.

To further examine the local media's effectiveness, in 2008, CROMAC researched and analyzed the Croatian press' contribution to providing information and teaching MRE. Using the quantitative method, the study examined mine-related articles in nine Croatian daily newspapers: *Vjesnik*, *Večernji list*, *Jutarnji list*, *24 sata*, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, *Glas Slavonije*, *Novi list*, *Zadarski list* and *Karlovački list*.

This media review covered 242 randomly selected newspaper articles published in the period 2005–2007. It investigated mine-related topics and content in order to analyze what

areas should be addressed more frequently—all with the purpose of achieving socially-responsible reporting about the existing mine danger, including special emphasis on informative and educational stories about the danger.

Results and Analysis

The analysis of mine action-related topics in the newspaper articles showed that most coverage focused on six main fields:

1. Informing the population about mine dangers
2. Providing MRE
3. Announcing mine-victim assistance
4. Advocating non-use of landmines
5. Reporting on the rights of demining staff
6. Discussing the socioeconomic impact of the mine problem

The remaining articles focused on other mine-related topics: reporting about different visits, signing cooperative agreements, demining companies' business operations, activities of nongovernmental organizations, etc. Table 2 presents the results obtained.

Of the topics studied in the selected articles, the most frequent topic, advocating non-use of landmines, was addressed

Framework of the topic	Frequency	%
Informing of population about mine danger	71	24.74
Mine-risk education	19	6.62
Mine-victim assistance	7	2.44
Advocating non-use of landmines	86	29.97
Rights of demining staff	20	6.96
Socioeconomic impact of mine problem	58	20.21
Other	26	9.06
Total	287	100

Table 2. Overview of the topic framework analysis.

29.97 percent of the time. In the framework of this topic, the frequency of the following subtopics was analyzed:

- International Mine Action Standards
- Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention
- Humanitarian action
- Donations for the purpose of technically surveying suspected areas and clearing known hazardous areas

The topic “informing the population about mine dangers” was recorded in 24.74 percent of the total number of topics analyzed. On the other hand, MRE appeared quite rarely, in 6.62 percent of the articles—an obvious lack of educational content aiming to increase the safety of citizens.

The socioeconomic impact as a result of the mine problem was represented in 20.21 percent of the articles. In the framework of this topic, the newspapers reported about different consequences of the mine problem: limitations in war-damaged family houses and the return of displaced persons, impact on construction of infrastructure and economic facilities, effects on agriculture and farming, etc. Articles of this nature discuss how mine-contaminated areas are an obstacle to the return of displaced citizens and increased economic activity.

Mine survivor assistance garnered only 2.44 percent of the attention, indicating that very few articles were dedicated to this topic. Also, contrary to what was expected, very few articles were dedicated to health care and psychological and social assistance for the mine survivors. In addition, very few articles were about projects of national institutions and NGOs intended for mine survivor-assistance purposes.

The topic entitled “reporting on the rights of demining staff” was covered in only 20 cases—in 6.96 percent of the total number of articles analyzed. In 1996, Croatia passed the Law on Humanitarian Demining and other laws that regulate demining-staff rights in a transparent manner. In addition, Croatia enacted a law specifically to cover the rights of demining staff in the event of an injury, and it is a States Party to the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons*

Framework of the topic	Frequency	%
Marking of mine-suspected areas	9	12.68
Notification for public about the beginning of demining	10	14.08
Information for public about definition of mine-suspected areas	10	14.08
Information for public about the course of demining	12	16.9
General information about mine situation of endangered communities	30	42.26
Handover of cleared areas	0	0

Table 3. Overview of the analysis of the topic, informing about mine danger.

with *Disabilities* (ratified in 2007) and follows all of the rights of this convention.^{1,8} Therefore, after a review of the articles, CROMAC concluded that reporting the rights of demining staff was no longer needed.

Informing the Public

CROMAC then wanted to further analyze the articles focused on informing the population about mine dangers and providing MRE. In order to discover the informative value of newspaper articles, the presence of the following indicators were analyzed:

- Information for the public about mine-suspected areas
- Information regarding marking of hazardous areas
- General information on the current mine situation of endangered communities
- Information for the public about the commencement of demining operations
- Announcements about demining courses
- Reports about the handover of cleared areas

Table 3 presents the analysis of these results, revealing that the most frequent topic addressed—in 42.26 percent of the articles—was “general information on the current mine situation.” Other categories were represented almost equally.

Very few articles were about specific terrain clearance, i.e., demining of particular areas. The fact that CROMAC did not find any articles about the handover of cleared areas confirmed this. However, the researchers believe that mass media must inform the local community about completed clearance projects, so locals know when it is safe to access demined areas.

To establish the educational value of the newspaper articles, the study analyzed the articles based on the presence of the following indicators:

- Information on organized forms of MRE
- Information about professional gatherings, symposiums and workshops
- Information on ERW types

- Information on clearance methods
- Information on procedures when encountering mines and ERW

The most represented indicators were information on mine and ERW types, with 31.58 percent of the articles mentioning this, and information on clearance methods, garnering 26.32 percent of the published articles (see Table 4).

Other categories were less frequently represented. The category “Information on procedures when encountering ERW” was never mentioned. According to these results, mine danger is poorly represented in newspapers except in the case of mine accidents, when such events become worthy of media attention. This analysis showed how newspapers use the space they have available. It also pointed out to the researchers that this space could be better used to invite the population to adhere to all possible measures of precaution and responsible behavior in mine-affected environments.

Conclusion

Even though the press contributes to informing and educating citizens about mine dangers, a need remains for more frequent reporting about safe behavior. Publicizing the status of demining in particular areas and the handover of cleared areas is also important. Reporting about humanitarian actions and donations is not enough, neither is emphasizing the mine problem as an obstacle to socioeconomic development. Disseminating information more efficiently is necessary, as well as making MRE more available until all contaminated areas are thoroughly cleared and handed over to the final beneficiaries for safe use.

For this purpose, more information regarding demining activities and the demining process should be sent to media outlets. It would also be helpful if

Framework of the topic	Frequency	%
Organized forms of mine-risk education	4	21.05
Professional gatherings, symposiums and workshops	4	21.05
Information on ERW types	6	31.58
Information on clearance methods	5	26.32
Information on the procedure when running into ERW	0	0

Table 4. Overview of the analysis of the topic, mine-risk education.

the media was invited to attend various demining activities, so that it could relay first-hand accounts of current dangers to the public and to periodically organize symposiums in which experts, journalists, activists and representatives of local communities participate in workshops designed to educate citizens about the mine threat.

The media’s social responsibility should be based on joint liability of all social subjects, because its interactive relationship with the public requires ethical behaviors in protection of civil interests and needs. CROMAC informs the population about mine-action activities and the mine situation in particular communities, but the communication with media takes place directly between CROMAC and the media, even though the assistance of a professional public-relations agency would probably make communications more efficient. Good cooperation through PR services that provide reliable and timely information may contribute to quality reporting about mine problems. 🌐

See endnotes page 82



Josip Čerina, Ph.D., is a professional military officer (Colonel), employed as Head of the CROMAC Regional Office in the Zadar region. In 2009, he defended his thesis, “Croatian press in promoting the international mine action principles,” at the University of Zadar, Informatology and Communications Department and thus obtained a Doctorate of Science in social sciences, field of information and communication science, mass media sector. He published two books and 11 papers, and participated in nine scientific and professional gatherings. His scientific interests include journalism, media and mine danger, reporting about war, and international crises.

Josip Čerina, Ph.D.
Head of the Office
Regional Office CROMAC Zadar
Stjepana Radića 11
23000 Zadar / Croatia
Tel: +385 23 224 870
Fax: +385 23 224 871
Email: josip.cerina@hcr.hr
Website: <http://www.hcr.hr/en/index.asp>