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Humanitarian Demining Accident and Incident Database

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DDAS Accident Report

Accident details

Report date: 16/05/2006	Accident number: 146
Accident time: not recorded	Accident Date: 29/09/1997
Where it occurred: Hassan Qala Village, Sayed Karam District, Paktiya Province	Country: Afghanistan
Primary cause: Field control inadequacy (?)	Secondary cause: Field control inadequacy (?)
Class: Excavation accident	Date of main report: [No date recorded]
ID original source: none	Name of source: MAPA/UNOCHA
Organisation: Name removed	
Mine/device: PMD-6 AP blast	Ground condition: dry/dusty soft
Date record created: 13/02/2004	Date last modified: 13/02/2004
No of victims: 1	No of documents: 1

Map details

Longitude:	Latitude:
Alt. coord. system:	Coordinates fixed by:
Map east:	Map north:
Map scale: not recorded	Map series:
Map edition:	Map sheet:
Map name:	

Accident Notes

inadequate investigation (?)
handtool may have increased injury (?)
partner's failure to "control" (?)
squatting/kneeling to excavate (?)
visor not worn or worn raised (?)

Accident report

At the time of the accident the UN MAC in Afghanistan favoured the use of two-man teams (usually operating a one-man drill). The two would take it in turns for one to work on

vegetation cutting, detecting and excavation, while the other both rested and supposedly "controlled" his partner.

An investigation on behalf of the UN MAC was carried out and its report made briefly available. The following summarises its content.

The victim had been a deminer for four years. It was five months since he last attended a revision course and 13 days since his last leave. The ground where the accident occurred was described as "soft agricultural land". A photograph showed dry and dusty flat ground with few stones. The victim was a lower-leg amputee from a previous mine accident. The demining group claimed to have found fragments identifying the device involved as a PMN.

As the deminer prodded towards the "centre" mark of the signal, the mine detonated, so indicating that he had marked the signal position incorrectly. The victim's helmet, bayonet and "anti-fragment" jacket were damaged.

The investigators said that, "When the deminer registered a reading on the detector, he marked the reading and then started prodding in half prone/squatting position. After a few minutes prodding he approached the second marker and the mine went off".

Witness reports all said the victim was working in a "half-prone" position [meaning "squatting" – or half way between lying down and standing up].

The Team Leader said the deminer was working properly and the accident may have been caused by the position of the mine in the ground being changed by rain.

The victim's partner said that the deminer was working properly but must have marked the detector reading improperly.

The Assistant Team Leader said that the deminer was working properly and that the position of the mine in the ground may have been changed by rain.

Conclusion

The investigators concluded that the accident occurred because the victim did not centralise the detector signal adequately before starting to prod. The man's disability meant that he could not "keep his balance during prodding" and so put pressure on the mine. The report stated that he was working in a "squatting/half prone position" and so may have applied too much pressure because of losing his balance.

Recommendations

The investigators recommended that the need to centralise the reading point of detectors should be stressed, that the demining group should not dismiss the people involved before the investigation is complete, and that disabled deminers should not be assigned prodding tasks.

Victim Report

Victim number: 187	Name: Name removed
Age:	Gender: Male
Status: deminer	Fit for work: not known
Compensation: 400,000 Rs	Time to hospital: not recorded
Protection issued: Frag jacket Helmet Thin, short visor	Protection used: Frag jacket, Helmet

Summary of injuries:

INJURIES

minor Arm

minor Face

minor Hand

severe Eyes

severe Hand

severe Hearing

COMMENT

Victim was an amputee from a previous accident. See medical report.

Medical report

The victim's injuries were summarised as superficial facial injuries on forehead, lacerations on both hands, "foreign bodies" in his eyes, injuries to right pollex, index and middle fingers, laceration to his right forearm, burns and abrasion on both hands, a "traumatic upper lip and nasal injury... left arm and forearm lacerated... cerebral abrasion and contusion".

A photograph showed a deep forehead laceration.

The demining group reported that the victim had sustained injuries to both arms, right hand, fragments to face and both eyes, and hearing loss to both ears. They submitted a disability claim to the insurers on 13th January 1998 that included a claim for a 50% hearing loss (assessed on 25th December 1997) and stated that the victim's eyes were passed "normal" on 7th January 1998.

In a letter dated 14th May 1998, the UN MAC's doctor appealed against the insurance settlement for the victim, saying he had lost vision in both eyes, hearing in both ears and loss of function of right thumb and index finger - yet was only paid 80% of the potential compensation. This implies a total payout of 400,000 Rs, although no record of a compensation payment was found in June 1998.

The claim for the victim was initially contested by the insurers who said he was not covered because he was an amputee from a mine accident in 1990 and was re-employed in 1995 (with the UN MAC's agreement).

Analysis

The primary cause of this accident is listed as a "*Field control inadequacy*" because the victim was not wearing his visor correctly (suffering forehead, face and eye injury) and his error was not corrected.

It is possible that the victim did not wear the visor correctly because it was too damaged to see through properly (as was seen frequently during field visits in 1998, 1999), in which case the failure to provide useable equipment may represent a serious management failing.

The victim's use of a frag-jacket is unusual. Although two per group were issued by the UN MAC some years before, they were very rarely used.

The use of a squatting position to "excavate" was in breach of UN requirements, but not in breach of the demining group's unauthorised variations to those requirements. The failure of the UN MAC to either listen to field feedback and adapt the SOP for local conditions, or enforce their own standards may be seen as a further management failing.

The agency that was used to make investigations for the UN MAC (based in Pakistan) at this time was frequently constrained by lack of funds, staff and transport. At times their movement was constrained by safety concerns. As a result, investigations were frequently delayed by weeks, meaning that an assessment of the site at the time of the accident was impossible.

Gathering of further accident and medical treatment detail was prevented by the UN programme manager who denied all access to records in September 1999. Access has continued to be denied up to the date of completion of this version of the database.