

Journal of Mine Action

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Ukraine

by Chad McCoull [Mine Action Information Center]

Under the brutal control of the Soviet Union during World War II, the terrain of present-day Ukraine was littered with minefields and munitions depots. When the Soviet Union disbanded into independent states in August 1991, the newborn Ukraine inherited the burden of Soviet munitions and mines. In February 1999 Ukraine signed the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention¹ but waited to ratify the law, seeking international assistance for the four-year stockpile destruction deadline.² In May 2005 the parliament in Kiev unanimously ratified the decision, President Viktor Yushchenko immediately signed it and the United Nations approved Ukraine's membership to the Convention. Ukraine became the 148th country to join the Convention in June 2006.³

Mine Problem

During World War II, Soviet military powers did not retain organized records for all Ukrainian mine locations.⁴ Today authorities search beneath the soil of an estimated 1,000 battle sites across Ukraine for over one million mines and explosive remnants of war.⁵ From 2000 to 2005, accidental detonations in such dangerous mine zones caused an average of 19 civilian casualties per year.⁴ Naval mines have also been found in the Black Sea. Waters off the Crimean Coast contain sunken ordnance authorities believe to be chemical munitions.⁴ Although these land and water mines pose a constant threat to Ukrainians, the largest quantity of ERW is amassed in stockpiles across the country.

To destroy 11 million stockpiled munitions requires great time, money and collaboration.⁶ Many factories in present-day Ukraine used to manufacture weapons during the war, but according to the government, all such production has ceased since the country's independence. Following the Soviet Union's separation, Ukraine gained custody of 7.17 million anti-personnel mines, the fourth largest stockpile in the world.³ This stockpile includes six million PFM-type mines, 400,000 PMN-type mines and 700,000 other miscellaneous mines.^{7,4} Overstocked accumulations of these mines are located in and around heavily populated cities and towns. Some Ukrainians live in constant fear of an unplanned explosion while some are not even aware of the threat. Multiple unexpected detonations have occurred recently in Sevastopol and Cvetoha, Khmel'nitskiy, area, causing sweeping fires and widespread damage.⁴ In the case of an unanticipated stockpile explosion, Ukraine has no emergency evacuation procedure for nearby citizens.⁴



Graphic courtesy of MAIC

Organizations and Programs

Nongovernmental organizations play an essential role in accomplishing Ukraine's Ottawa Convention goals, providing such services as coastal waters safety programs, demining teams, information dissemination, emergency agencies, survivor assistance and mine-risk education.⁸ In January 2004 the Ukrainian Mine Action Coordination Center united six major Ukrainian NGOs in order to organize and coordinate improvement efforts.⁴ In 2006 UMACC created the Humanitarian Mine Action Forum to pool the knowledge of even more NGOs. In January of the same year the Government Committee on Legal and Defense Policy laid the preparatory groundwork necessary to establish a federally-supported mine-action network. In February a group of German and Swedish organizations received US\$7.6 million (€5.6 million⁹) from the European Commission for the task of Ukrainian PFM destruction.⁴

With the exception of informative television broadcasts, MRE has not yet been implemented on a national scale.⁴ However, citizens receive instruction locally if their region is especially dangerous or about to be demined. Though upper grade levels in some secondary schools learn mine-risk prevention in preparation for military duty, teens remain the most susceptible demographic to mine accidents.⁴ Due to schools' widespread requests for MRE, the Emergency Ministry has launched a mine-awareness education campaign, hoping for eventual complete participation across the country.⁸

Mine Action

During 2001 and 2002 demining teams eliminated 348,000 explosive remnants of war in Ukrainian soil.⁶ From August 2005 until January 2006, deminers gathered 1.1 million additional remnants.⁴ In mine-laden areas, individual teams defuse an average of 150 to 200 munitions every day.⁶

Small-scale destruction projects led by local communities and their sponsors have eliminated substantial quantities of stockpiled mines. A military base in Novobogdanovka has recently received state support for completely demolishing its stockpiles.⁴ In another case, the city of Donetsk used an out-of-commission chemical plant to convert 400,000 mines into children's toys such as plastic pelicans.¹⁰ Ukraine disposed of 100,000 stockpiled PFM-1 mines in 19987 and all of its stockpiled PMN-type mines during 2002 and 2003.³ In 2005 over 39,000 munitions were obliterated by the government.⁴ In the same year the European Commission began arranging large-scale plans for the nationwide stockpile demolition. In 2006 the European Commission announced it would fund an upcoming project for the neutralization of PFM-type landmines, which have been environmentally harmful and difficult to defuse in the process of stockpile destruction.¹¹ With a \$7 million (€5.1 million Euros⁹) contribution from the European Union and 16 countries, the United States has piloted a project to destroy 1.5 million small-caliber weapons and munitions in Ukraine.¹² The United States has supplemented an additional \$2 million (€1.47 million Euros⁹) in order to destroy more major weapons including 2,000 Man-Portable Air Defense Systems.¹² The NATO Partnership for Peace Trust Fund has sponsored these actions.

In accordance with Ottawa Convention deadlines, Ukraine will have totally destroyed its stockpiles by June 2010 and cleared its minefields by June 2016. In this time of national transformation, Ukraine is forging a brighter future by attending to the mine threat of its Soviet past. ↕

Biography

Chad McCoull joined the *Journal of Mine Action* in January 2007 as an Editorial Assistant. He is currently a technical and scientific communication major at James Madison University. He is pursuing a concentration in online publications and a minor in writing and rhetoric.



Endnotes

1. *Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects*, Geneva, Switzerland, 10 October 1980. <http://www.ccw-treaty.com/KeyDocs/ccw-treaty-text.htm>. Accessed 7 May 2007. This Convention is also referred to as the CCW or CCCW.
2. "Ukraine Votes to Ratify Mine Ban Treaty." Landmine Survivors Network. May 2005. http://www.landminesurvivors.org/news_feature.php?id=64. Accessed 7 May 2007.
3. Brigot, Sylvie. "Ukraine Ratified the Mine Ban Treaty." International Campaign to Ban Landmines. 25 January 2006. http://www.icbl.org/news/ukraine_ratification. Accessed 7 May 2007.
4. "Ukraine." *Landmine Monitor Report*. 12 September 2006. <http://www.icbl.org/lm/2006/ukraine>. Accessed 15 March 2007.
5. **Editor's Note:** Some organizations consider mines and ERW to be two separate entities, since they are regulated by different legal documents (the former by the Ottawa Convention and Amended Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, the latter by CCW Protocol V). However, since mines are explosive devices that have similar effects to other ERW and it is often impossible to separate the two during clearance operations, some in the community have adopted a "working definition" (as opposed to a legal one) of ERW in which it is a blanket term that includes mines, UXO, abandoned explosive ordnance and other explosive devices.
6. Pashinsky, Sergei. "Ukraine Responds to New Mine Action Demands." *Journal of Mine Action*. Issue 7.3, December 2003. <http://www.jmu.edu/cisr/journal/7.3/focus/pashinsky/pashinsky.htm>. Accessed 15 March 2007.
7. For more information on each of these munitions, see the Mine Action Information Center's "Munitions Reference." Available at <http://www.jmu.edu/cisr/pages/research/munitions.shtml>. Accessed 7 May 2007.
8. Pashinsky, Sergio. "Ukrainian Mine Action." *Journal of Mine Action*. Issue 6.1 April 2002. <http://www.jmu.edu/cisr/journal/6.1/focus/pashinsky/pashinsky.htm>. Accessed 7 May 2007.
9. Exchange rate as of 9 May 2007.
10. Dansereau, Kevin. "NATO-sponsored Project Reduces Massive Mine Stockpile Across Eastern Ukraine." *Journal of Mine Action*. Issue 7.2, August 2003. <http://www.jmu.edu/cisr/journal/7.2/focus/dansereau/dansereau.htm>. Accessed 7 May 2007.
11. "Update 4—Stockpile Destruction." 12 September 2006. International Campaign to Ban Landmines. http://www.icbl.org/treaty/meetings/7msp/updates/them_updates/stockdest. Accessed 7 May 2007.
12. "State Department Co-Hosts NATO Partnership for Peace Trust Fund Workshop." U.S. Department of State. 21 February 2007. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2007/february/80837.htm>. Accessed 7 May 2007.

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