

Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction

Volume 4
Issue 3 *The Journal of Mine Action*

Article 2

October 2000

The International Committee of the Red Cross Mine/UXO Awareness Programs

Laurence Desvignes
ICRC

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal>



Part of the [Defense and Security Studies Commons](#), [Emergency and Disaster Management Commons](#), [Other Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons](#), and the [Peace and Conflict Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Desvignes, Laurence (2000) "The International Committee of the Red Cross Mine/UXO Awareness Programs," *Journal of Mine Action* : Vol. 4 : Iss. 3 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol4/iss3/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction by an authorized editor of JMU Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact dc_admin@jmu.edu.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS MINE/UXO AWARENESS PROGRAMS

by Laurence Desvignes,
ICRC

*Villagers returning home to
Tulza, Bosnia-Herzegovina are
alerted to the danger of AP
mines surrounding them.*
Photo c/o ICRC / Giovanni Diffidenti

The ICRC Approach

Many current mine awareness strategies continue to use a "presentation approach," in which the community remains passive and simply receives information. For organizations using such an approach, mine awareness amounts to a simple public information campaign isolated from other kinds of mine ac-

tion and humanitarian activities. With the aim of addressing the threat of mines and UXO more effectively, the ICRC has adopted another approach. First, the ICRC gathers relevant information on local needs, which can be used to devise an appropriate mine/UXO awareness strategy. Next, the ICRC involves mine-contaminated communities in the mine aware-

ness process. The ICRC also cooperates closely with other organizations in responding to community needs.

To deliver appropriate prevention messages to the population at risk, the ICRC approach begins with a need-based assessment on the knowledge, perception and attitudes of the population concerning the dangers of mines and UXO. Such an assessment also involves gathering data on mine/UXO casualties, which is used to create a victim profile rating to include information on where and under what circumstances the accidents occurred. Analysis of this information is essential to develop an appropriate mine awareness strategy for the local situation. Mine awareness strategies include placing emphasis on training courses, target populations, particular kinds of messages, the content of printed materials or various activities for children or adults. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the ICRC data collection system showed that 30 percent of the mine victims were injured or killed in areas they knew to be dangerous. It is therefore crucial to take this factor into consideration and adapt the messages to the specific threat faced by the community.

The use of passive means (posters, leaflet distributions and lectures or presentations) to deliver mine awareness messages will not prevent accidents caused by high-risk behavior. To understand the causes of such behavior, it is essential to *work with the communities* and gather information on the risks that people are taking, why they are doing so (e.g., economic or emotional factors, social pressures or naivete), how they perceive the mine/UXO problem and what solutions they propose. It is important, therefore, not only to deliver the right message in the right way but also to find appropriate educational strategies to *change high-risk behavior*, which can be achieved by involving the communities in addressing the problem.

ICRC mine/UXO awareness teams are exchanging views with communities and also initiating dialogues within them to identify economic, technical and information solutions to the mine/UXO problem. Whenever necessary, the ICRC teams are cooperating with others in the humanitarian sector (including the mine-action sector) to facilitate implementation of these solutions.



Data gathering is essential for planning mine awareness activities.
Photo c/o ICRC / Giovanni Diffidenti

*The ICRC is the lead
agency for
collecting data on
mine/UXO
casualties.
Information is
obtained from both
civilians, hospitals
and directly from
local communities.*

Regular monitoring of ICRC mine/UXO awareness activities is essential for program evaluation. National Red Cross instructors and ICRC staff carry out monitoring of some projects on a monthly basis. Results are compared with the objectives set at the beginning of the year; if the objectives have not been achieved, suitable adjustments are made.

Evaluations of mine awareness programs are difficult, however, because they involve accounting for both quantitative and qualitative information and emphasizing the different factors, such as mine clearance and population movements. Data collection in Bosnia-Herzegovina revealed a significant decrease in the number of casualties due to mines: from a monthly average of 66 victims during 1992-1995, the figure dropped to 52 in 1996, 24 in 1997, 12 in 1998 and eight in 1999. This decrease can be attributed, in part, to mine awareness activities, but also to the range of mine-action programs that have been implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Population



movements and mine-clearance activities may also have influenced the number of accidents. The ICRC intends to improve its monitoring and evaluation procedures in order to assess as accurately as possible the real impact of its mine awareness programs.

ICRC Mine/UXO Awareness Programs Worldwide

The ICRC has been running mine/UXO awareness programs since 1996, often in close cooperation with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, with the aim to reduce the risk of death and injury faced by civilians living in mined areas. Today, it operates programs in Afghanistan, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Lebanon, Ingushetia and Daghestan (targeting the Chechen IDPs), Kosovo and Nagorny Karabakh. In February 2000, its program in Azerbaijan was turned over to the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action (ANAMA).

The ICRC is the lead agency for collecting data on mine/UXO casualties. Information is obtained from both civilian and KFOR hospitals and directly from local communities. The information on each casualty is passed to the U.N. Mine Action Coordination Center in Pristina. There it is entered into the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) database where it can be analyzed regularly. The ICRC uses the data to adapt and develop mine awareness programs to meet community needs. In particular, it targets high-risk groups and areas where mine awareness training is needed and adjusts mine awareness messages to account for the prevailing conditions and the causes of casualties.

Data-gathering activities (including needs assessment, mine/UXO casualties and ad hoc socioeconomic studies on the impact of mines/UXO on local communities) are an integral part of mine awareness programs. In some places, other organizations had already begun to gather data before the ICRC's arrival, eliminating the need for the ICRC to do so. In other countries such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Afghanistan, Nagorny Karabakh, Kosovo and Chechnya, the ICRC is currently gathering data as part of its mine awareness activities.

In Kosovo, a needs assessment was carried out jointly by the ICRC, the Mines Advisory Group and UNICEF in a sample of three villages from each of the province's five regions where mine/UXO accidents have occurred. The assessment covered the entire community, as well as specific groups such as teachers, children and mine victims. The Mine Awareness Task Force devised a mine awareness strat-



A game involving four groups of the Youth Red Cross on sensitivity to the dangers of mines in Ogulin, Croatia.

Photo c/o ICRC / Giovanni Diffidenti

egy based on analysis of the information gathered.

In Afghanistan, the ICRC has collected 70 percent of all the information already available. Closer ties are being formed with the coordinating body for mine action (MCPA/UN) in order to improve the exchange, use and reporting of information on mine/UXO victims.

The aim of ICRC mine awareness programs is to reduce casualties. One important way to achieve this aim is to persuade the relevant ministries along with the province, district and village authorities and the communities themselves to be actively involved to keep mine awareness alive and deal with the threat for as long as it exists. Once data-gathering activities have been carried out and the mine awareness strategy defined, the priority of the ICRC mine/UXO awareness programs is to involve local communities and authorities and to coordinate mine awareness activities with broader programs of mine action and humanitarian aid.

The ICRC usually implements these programs through National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The involvement of a national society depends on

awareness program in Croatia. The strength of the program lies in the work carried out by the 45 local CRC branches located in areas contaminated by mines or UXO. Since 1996, 100 Red Cross instructors have ensured that mine awareness messages are repeated often and are understood.

Since March 1996, the ICRC has been carrying out mine/UXO awareness activities throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina in close cooperation with partners from the Red Cross organizations in both entities of the country. It has been operating at the grassroots level through a network of 130 trained Red Cross mine awareness instructors and 19 Red Cross regional/cantonal coordinators.

Involvement of Local Communities and Handover to Local Authorities

The process of handing over mine awareness activities to local Red Cross organizations began in 1998, and was formalized in early 2000, with the signing of the Cooperation Framework Agreement between the ICRC and Red Cross organizations in both entities. Local Red Cross coordinators at the regional/cantonal level are increasing their involvement in most field activities with the assistance and support of ICRC staff. Although Red Cross volunteers from municipal branches took part in the program when it first began, the two Red Cross headquarters did not become involved until a later stage, making the handover process more difficult.

In Azerbaijan, the ICRC program launched in autumn 1996 was turned over to the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action in February 2000. The ICRC considers this a crucial step towards national capacity building and coordination of awareness and clearance activities.

In the region of Nagorny Karabakh, a working group on the mine/UXO issue was formed that included representatives of the local media and several ministries, including defense, education and health. The ICRC, in cooperation with the education ministry, is now implementing a school program designed to train 72 teachers. In support of these school activities, a professional theater company from Armenia was commissioned by the ICRC to write, produce and perform a mine/UXO awareness puppet show for

ICRC • ICRC • ICRC • ICRC

Just for the Children

Current activities in Bosnia-Herzegovina include data gathering, a community-based program, a school program, and a mass media campaign. Red Cross volunteers use the community-based approach to identify the needs of local communities, to support efforts and initiatives originating in the communities and to encourage community members to become involved in seeking answers to the mine/UXO problem. Mine awareness sessions for high-risk groups, such as returnees, associations of hunters, fishermen, agricultural workers, refugees from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as well as local residents and children, are organized in response to local needs.

Children have been specifically targeted through the school system and out-of-school activities. With the strong support of the education ministries in both entities, primary-

school teachers were trained to conduct mine awareness activities for the younger generation. Children are encouraged to become creatively involved by taking part in self-initiated mine awareness-oriented events throughout the country, such as mine awareness drawing, essay and quiz competitions. The "Tarzan Project,"



Photo c/o ICRC / Giovanni Diffidenti

a joint initiative of the ICRC, UNICEF, the U.N. Development Program, the Bosnia-Herzegovina Mine Action Center (BHMIC) and SFOR, consists of broadcasting mine awareness spots for children prior to showing the Tarzan movie.

As part of the school program, 110 mine awareness performances of a play for children based on "Little Red Riding Hood and the Big Bad Wolf" were performed throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina. In this adaptation of a well-known story, the wolf is portrayed as the bad character that is trying to lure the little girl into a mine field planted with mines in the form of flowers, toys, etc.

In addition to the media coverage of mine awareness activities, an ongoing media campaign designed to reinforce the mine awareness messages was launched by the ICRC, including mine awareness radio and TV spots, a series of talk shows, interviews and quizzes on local radio and TV stations throughout the country.



Photo c/o ICRC / Giovanni Diffidenti

children. Finally, a community-based program was drawn up and has begun to be implemented in affected villages.

In Albania, the ICRC has worked closely with the Albanian Red Cross, since 1997, to alert the population to the dangers of weapons. As a result of the conflict in Kosovo, an initial emergency response was launched along the northern border of the country (leaflets and posters were distributed in communities near the mined areas) and in the refugee camps.

Later, 15 Albanian Red Cross instructors and one coordinator were trained by the ICRC Croatian team to implement community-based mine awareness programs.

In southern Lebanon, the number of mine/UXO casualties following the withdrawal of Israeli forces increased. Since June 2000, an ICRC mine awareness delegate has provided support to the Lebanese Red Cross Society's mine/UXO awareness program by training Red Cross staff members.

Coordination with Mine Action Programs

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, data collection on mine/UXO casualties enabled Red Cross mine awareness personnel to directly contact victims who were then able to voice their needs. Mine victims either receive direct aid from the ICRC or are put in touch with other organizations.

Once the Ottawa Treaty banning AP mines came into action in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the authorities pledged to promote programs of victim assistance, socio-economic reintegration and mine awareness. In December 1999, a strategic framework for victim assistance was initiated in order to facilitate concerted action at all levels through assistance programs, donors, government institutions or services and NGOs. The ICRC has been assigned the task of liaising with the government of Bosnia-Herzegovina under the strategic framework.

In Kosovo, in order to ensure that mine-contaminated communities receive timely responses to their requests and that their involvement leads to concrete results, the ICRC has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Swiss Federation for Mine Clearance (FSD). Under this agreement, FSD clearance teams respond to urgent requests for clearance or marking forwarded to it by the ICRC mine awareness teams. This close cooperation in the field allows mine-contaminated communities to become directly involved in the technical response to the mine/UXO problems they face. If a request cannot be agreed to, the FSD provides an explanation directly to the community.

In Albania, an assessment mission was carried out jointly by the ICRC and a mine-clearance NGO, in June 2000, to determine the extent of the mine/UXO problem in the three most contaminated northern districts. The aim was to facilitate the start of clearance and marking activities by obtaining the support of local authorities and ascertaining the needs of the communities. If the project goes ahead, clearance activities will be directly coordinated with the Albanian/ICRC mine awareness program.

The community-based mine awareness program in Albania is also closely tied to relief for mine victims. The ICRC has organized transportation for

mine victims from northern Albania to the rehabilitation center in Tirana. The ICRC has also arranged with the center to fit amputees with prostheses. This program is ongoing.

All organizations need to be willing to coordinate their efforts for clearance activities, assistance to mine victims and humanitarian projects to work efficiently. It is also essential that the ICRC mine awareness program be strongly developed at field level and involve mine-contaminated communities in efforts to make their villages safer.



Campaign to alert people of the dangers of mines in Skenderaj, Krasmiroc, Kosovo.
Photo c/o ICRC / Giovanni Diffidenti

Evolution of Mine/UXO Awareness Programs

The form, content and structure of a mine awareness program will depend on the local situation. It will not always be possible to implement a community-based approach. However, emergency campaigns and programs using a "presentation approach" have generally been transformed into community-based efforts once circumstances have allowed.

At the end of the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, it was essential that returnees, internally displaced persons and residents be quickly informed of the dan-

ger posed by mines and UXO. The mine/UXO awareness program was launched in March 1996, with an emergency public-awareness campaign, and has evolved into a coordinated program. This program now consists of four main components: data gathering, a community-based program, a school program and a mass-media campaign.

Even as general messages were given to the children during the emergency campaign (e.g., "Don't touch mines and UXO; they are dangerous;" "Don't play with mines and UXO; they can kill you"), the transformation to a community-based approach involved using interactive activities designed to give a sense of responsibility to children and make them think about the consequences of their actions. Games and activities showing the physical effects of mines and UXO replaced the negative message "don't touch." For adults, the "don't touch" message was replaced by a "think mines" message designed to keep the people aware at all times of the dangers they face in their communities.

In Croatia, presentations in schools and communities by Red Cross instructors were followed by a media campaign (including five television and 15 radio spots with jingles) on national television and radio channels. By May 2000, a total of 9,549 presentations had been made to 207,585 participants—144,348 children, 36,437 men and 26,800 women.

To mobilize and empower communities and enlist the support of local authorities and the media, a community-based approach was introduced in autumn 1998. Since then, the ICRC has supported and facilitated local initiatives throughout mine-contaminated communities. Such projects, which often involve innovative approaches, emanate from within the community and are developed with the assistance and cooperation of the ICRC and the Croatian Red Cross. As part of the community-based program, 59 ten-day exhibitions have been held in mined areas since May 2000, attracting a total of 50,270 visitors. Other activities have included caricature exhibitions, Red Cross workshops, round table discussions, a multimedia slide show for teenagers entitled, "If You Can Tolerate This," shown in disco clubs, a concert on behalf of humanitarian causes entitled, "It Can Happen to You," a community-based drama dedicated to mine victims, and mine awareness events organized during soccer and handball tournaments. Assistance is also regularly given to NGOs interested in developing their own mine awareness activities.

In Kosovo, the ICRC began to inform people of the dangers of mines and UXO when it was working in refugee camps. When ICRC teams returned to Kosovo in May 1999, a complete campaign was high on their list of priorities. The emergency program turned into a comprehensive one, involving the mine-contaminated communities as soon as refugees began returning to their homes in June and July 1999.

In refugee camps, people were cautioned about the dangers they would face from booby traps when they returned home. However, when the community-based approach started in Kosovo and clearance agencies did not find as many booby traps as expected, the mine awareness message about these devices was abandoned.

Another message initially given was to respect marking signs indicating mine fields. But once the program started in Kosovo, it became clear that curiosity was one of the main causes of high-risk behavior: people entered mined areas despite the signs. Mine awareness instructors therefore decided to use real-life stories about people being injured or killed after entering marked mine fields. Rather than just delivering information such as "Do not remove marking signs" and "Do not cross the marking lines" to a passive audience, the instructors told the stories to provoke discussion among the audience on the consequences of risky behavior. It is hoped that this approach will result in changes of behavior. More evaluations are needed to determine whether this hope is justified.

In Kinsangani, when civilians returned home after the fighting between forces of the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) and Ugandan People's Defense Forces (UPDF), an emergency information campaign was launched through the local radio to inform the population of the dangers posed by UXO and mines laid by the fighting parties. The national army was able to carry out UXO and mine clearance. The ICRC offered logistical support, however, to seven army specialists involved in clearing and marking dangerous areas. ■

Contact Information

Laurence Desvignes, ICRC Geneva
ICRC
19 avenue de la Paix
CH 1202 Genève, Switzerland
Tel: +41 (22) 7346001
E-mail: ldesvignes.GVA@icrc.org