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NPA’s Survey and Clearance of Cluster Munitions Along the Thailand-Cambodia Border

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Although some mine-clearance procedures are also suitable for submunition survey and clearance, it is important that more efficient procedures specifically tailored to cluster-munitions identification and removal, including establishing the submunitions footprint, are used when possible. See endnotes page 82.

Conclusion

Submunitions are different from mines and other ERW in a number of ways. Because of these unique characteristics, it is an advantage to develop unique land-release methodology for the survey and clearance of submunitions so that the most efficient approach is used.

The February conflict at the Thailand-Cambodia border over disputed territory has left Cambodia with the burden of clearing cluster munitions. By applying to the Thai-Cambodian conflict strategies for cluster munitions removal that were successful in other post-conflict areas, NPA is assisting the Cambodian Mine Action Centre in cleaning up the problem. Thailand and Cambodia have not acceded to the ban on cluster munitions established in the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions and are therefore not subject to its provisions. Both countries attended the CCM 2011 inter-sessional meeting in June, leaving many hopeful that the two countries will become States Parties.

M48 SD in Cambodia
All photos courtesy of Stephanie de Gref, Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor

by Atle Karlsen | Norwegian People's Aid |

Thailand has requested that the CMAC take steps to remove the contamination. The CMAC has agreed to conduct a survey of the area and to address the issue in a timely manner.

Acknowledgements

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CMAC identified 12 cluster-bomb-unit strike sites, and the initial priority recommended by the assessment team was to conduct a rapid but systematic survey of the contaminated areas. While the land has yet to be cleared, CMAC has used the NPA survey to restrict the contaminated area and conduct mine-risk education for the local people. No accidents have occurred since.

Deployment of NPA/CMAC Teams
Upon agreeing to assist CMAC, NPA contracted a technical advisor to supervise the training and deployment of survey teams for future battle-area clearance. Based on the assessment, CMAC requested NPA to provide technical support and use the survey teams for future battle-area clearance of the contaminated areas. While the land has yet to be cleared, CMAC has used the NPA survey to restrict the contaminated area and conduct mine-risk education for the local people. No accidents have occurred since.

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Lessons Learned
The clearance of cluster-munition remnants, including unexploded submunitions, is not in and of itself particularly difficult, and many international organizations have cleared various explosive remnants of war. However, the knowledge of the threat expected is important. Normally, the threat picture in Southeast Asia would consist of slightly less dangerous submunitions (like the BLU-26, BLU-3 B and BLU-24 B), but in the case described above, survey teams found the newer and more dangerous M85 type2 submunition, which changed the way the SOPs for clearance were developed. Unexploded M85 SD submunitions with self-destruction mechanism were found armed and not detonated. Good surveying of cluster-munition remnants is potentially more efficient than is the case with, for example, landmines, as more and often better quality data is available up front (bombing data coordinates, numbers and types of ordnance used). The Cluster Munition Coalition called on Thailand to release data on target coordinates and numbers and types of cluster munitions used since this could have greatly assisted the survey.

Finally, in many affected countries, a thorough survey establishes the location of cluster-munition remnants, contributes to a greater understanding and real estimation of the contamination problem; and determines where cluster-munition remnants are not a threat. Further, a quality survey allows people in unaffected areas to continue with their lives in safety, and prevents the wasteful use of scarce clearance resources in unaffected areas.

Table 1. (Clusters per task) Items of cluster munitions found in Cambodia during survey.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Items/TASK</th>
<th>Sen Chey</th>
<th>Thomcheat</th>
<th>Area 011</th>
<th>Spot tasks</th>
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<td>6</td>
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