

Notes on a Meeting of the Users' Focus Group to Discuss the Review and Revision of Mine Clearance Standards

(Prepared by Alastair McAslan, Project Manager)

Introduction

1. The first meeting of the Users' Focus Group (UFG) was held at James Madison University on 28 and 29 October 1999 to discuss the review and revision of international mine clearance standards.
2. The meeting had four principal objectives.
 - a. To discuss the terms of reference for the review and revision, including the roles and responsibilities of UNHQ, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), the UFG and specialist working groups.
 - b. To discuss the relationship between the review (of mine clearance standards) with the development of other mine action standards and guidelines.
 - c. To identify and discuss the principal challenges which may face the review process, including the need to agree a definition of 'clearance' which is consistent with the requirements of the Ottawa Convention and to develop more appropriate standards for personal protection equipment.
 - d. To discuss the staffing of the revised standards and guidelines, including the need for dialogue and transparency.

The purpose of the first meeting was not to produce solutions. Its aim was to ensure that the review process will be able to take advantage of the individual and collective views of the UFG, and thus provide standards and guidelines which will be appropriate and effective, and which will be adopted and applied by the field users.

3. The meeting was hosted by James Madison University. Alastair McAslan of GICHD (the project manager) was chairman. A list of attendees, which includes telephone numbers and e-mail addresses, is at Annex A.

Framework of Mine Action Standards

4. Hemi Morete (of UNMAS) introduced the concept of a 'framework of international mine action standards and guidelines', and described the role of UNMAS in providing overall direction and co-ordination for UN mine action standards.
5. In this respect it is important to note that the review and revision of mine clearance standards must be seen as just one of a number of mine action standards and guidelines. Some sectoral standards and guidelines already exist (such as International Guidelines on Landmine and UXO Awareness Education), some are under development (such as International Socio-economic Indicators of Impact), and others still need to be developed (such as mine action terminology and definitions).
7. In the future it may be appropriate to make greater use of the International Standards Organization (ISO) system. A number of mine action standards, in particular those associated with technology and management practices, may benefit from the status and authority which is conferred by ISO and its partner organisations. The project manager explained the strategic partnership between the UN and ISO, which entitles UN standards (which have been formally approved by the UN System) to be accepted as de facto international standards, and vice versa.
8. During the discussion, agreement was reached that:
 - a. The UN System in general, and UNMAS in particular, has a privileged role in promoting international mine action standards and guidelines. For the foreseeable future UNMAS is likely to act as custodian for international mine action standards and guidelines.

b. National mine action centres will normally apply appropriate national standards to tasks and activities conducted as part of a national mine action programme. International standards and guidelines must therefore reflect the collective needs of the national mine action authorities.

c. There is a wish by the User Community to develop an international professional 'Association' or 'Guild' of mine clearance practitioners. Such an Association should have a key role in the future development and application of appropriate and effective international standards and guidelines.

9. During the discussion it was agreed that quality management, including quality assurance and quality control, affects most mine action functions and activities, not only mine clearance projects. It was therefore recommended that quality management should not be considered within the review and revision of mine clearance standards. Instead, a separate (and complementary) study of quality management and its application to mine action generally, should be conducted. UNMAS agreed to prepare terms of reference for such a project and to address the funding requirements.

The Review and Revision Process

10. The project manager summarised the project terms of reference. He reminded the UFG that GICHD has been invited by UNMAS to co-ordinate the review and revision of the mine clearance standards, under the overall guidance and direction of Chief UNMAS.

11. The first phase of this process involves the collection and collation of information from people and organisations who use the current mine clearance standards, and learning from those who use standards, guidelines and codes of practice in other related areas of work. A questionnaire is to be issued to all mine action centres, major demining NGOs and commercial contractors, and other organisations who apply existing mine clearance standards. The questionnaire was discussed as a separate agenda item (see Paragraphs 25 and 26).

12. The second stage will start with a meeting of UNHQ, the UFG and the project manager to discuss the results of the questionnaire, and to agree on the changes necessary to the clearance standards. Some of the changes will be merely editorial, but there may be some difficult legal and technical issues which need to be addressed. It is envisaged that expert advice and assistance will be required, for example on topics such as medical support, risk management and management training. The second stage will end with a meeting of UNHQ, the UFG and the project manager to discuss the proposed changes and agree the revised document. Agreement on the relevance, accuracy and utility of the revised document is essential at this stage.

13. The third stage of the review involves preparing and staffing the revised standards document. The document should be briefed to the Steering Group by 28 April 2000, and subsequently posted on the UNMAS web site. It should then be briefed to the wider mine action community through a programme of seminars and workshops, ideally at regional locations.

Role and Responsibilities of the Users Focus Group

14. The project manager summarised the role and responsibilities of the UFG. He reminded the UFG that its role is to provide the review process with '... informed and authoritative opinions on the practical application of humanitarian mine clearance standards at field user level. In addition to the tasks outlined in Paragraphs 12 and 13 above, the UFG will be invited to provide advice as required to the Steering Group, UNMAS and the project manager.

15. The UFG accepted its role and responsibilities as defined in Annex B of the project terms of reference. The UFG noted the role and responsibilities of the Steering Group and project manager as defined in Annexes A and D of the project terms of reference.

Personal Protection Equipment

16. David McCracken briefed the UFG on the testing of personal protection equipment (PPE) at the Defence Research Establishment at Suffield, Canada. He indicated that the tests, together with other information, such as the data on mine victims collected by Andy Smith on behalf of the US Government, may provide the foundations for a much better set of PPE standards.

17. The UFG discussed the issues of protection standards, liability and duty of care. Robert Keeley reminded the UFG of the rationale behind the standards which were proposed at the Copenhagen Conference in July 1996, and subsequently adopted as UN standards for PPE.

18. It was agreed to form a working group on PPE standards. The group will be invited to report to the next meeting of the UFG on the state of current knowledge on the threat and PPE. This should include the needs and aspirations of the User Community, appropriate research and development, ongoing testing and evaluation (both civilian and military), and a summary of PPE equipment available off-the-shelf. The project manager will provide terms of reference to the working group by 22 November 1999. The following have volunteered to be members of the group: Alan Jones (Secretary), George Zahaczewsky, David McCracken, Andy Smith, Steve Brown and Robert Keeley. CLEARANCE STANDARDS

19. The UFG agreed that the definition of 'clearance' should be reviewed and revised. The current document states that:

An area is cleared when all mines and munitions have been removed and/or destroyed. All debris from mines and explosives such as fuzing systems, percussion caps and other items that constitute an explosive hazard, is to be removed.

The area should be cleared of mines to a standard and depth which is agreed to be appropriate to the residual/planned use of the land, and which is achievable in terms of the resources and time available. The contractor must achieve at least 99.6% of the agreed standard of mine clearance. The target for all UN-sponsored clearance programmes is the removal of all mines and UXO to a depth of 200mm.

There are many problems with this standard. First, no guidance is given on how to assess what is 'appropriate'. Second, no prodders and few hand held mine detectors will safely detect minimum-metal anti-personnel mines down to 200mm. Third, 99.6% must be translated into something which can be verified by quality assurance; there are currently no common guidelines for interpreting how 99.6% can be measured or objectively verified in different circumstances.

20. There is a need to establish a standard of 'clearance' which is understood, which can be applied by the mine action community at field level, which can be verified during the QA process, and which is consistent with the requirements of the Ottawa Convention. (Note: The Ottawa Convention's Standing Committee of Experts on Mine Clearance has requested that the revised standard of 'clearance' be briefed to the Second Meeting of States Parties in Geneva in September 2000. The meeting will be invited to endorse the revised standard's consistency with the requirements of the Convention.)

21. Mike McAlpine proposed that we should learn from the application of standards in other 'benchmark industries' which involve significant hazards and potential harm. He stated that in recent years a number of industries with similar characteristics to mine clearance, such as land decontamination and the construction industry, have reviewed their standards. There has, in general, been a move away from inflexible (and often inappropriate) global standards to a more flexible approach reflecting local needs and circumstances.

22. Mike McAlpine proposed that particular attention be paid to the application of risk management. He suggested to the UFG that the current standard (see Paragraph 19 above) often hinders the successful introduction of new technologies and more effective operational procedures, including the wider acceptance of dogs for Level 2 survey and clearance.

23. Robert Keeley suggested that the concept of risk management was often misunderstood, and could be interpreted by some as a 'watering down' of existing standards or providing a 'trojan horse' for the introduction of inappropriate and/or unsafe technologies and operational procedures. Thus such an approach must take into account public perception of the concept of 'risk' and 'risk management', and the global aspiration to remove 'all mines and UXO which have the potential to cause harm'.

24. It was agreed to form a working group on the application of risk management to clearance standards. The group will be invited to report to the next meeting of the UFG. Case studies of standards and methodologies for other risk-intensive industries should be included. A stakeholder analysis will be required to determine the needs and aspirations of those most closely involved with mine clearance, and to understand their views on risk and

risk management. The project manager will provide terms of reference to the working group by 22 November 1999. The following have volunteered to be members of the group: Mike McAlpine (Secretary), David Hewitson, Chris Pearce, Steve Brown and Havard Bach.

Training Standards

25. Mike McAlpine briefed the UFG on the UNDP-led work to develop standards for management training. The first stage of this work, which was an analysis of the training needs of national managers as part of national capacity building, was completed in March 1999. A training syllabus is currently being prepared, and it is planned to hold a pilot course, probably early next year at Cranfield University. The UFG noted the need to extend the scope of management training to include the training of technical advisers.

26. The UFG also stressed the need to improve the consistency of technical and skills training. The current International Standards document does not adequately address this issue. The revised process should consider the merits and feasibility of providing international accreditation for technical and skills training courses.

The Questionnaire

27. As stated in Paragraph 6a above, a questionnaire is to be issued to all mine action centres, major demining NGOs and commercial contractors, and other organisations who apply existing mine clearance standards. The replies will be collated and analysed to identify common concerns, observations and proposals which may influence the scope and conduct of the review. The project manager stressed that this part of the review is critical and sufficient resources, time and thinking must be devoted to understanding the field users' needs and the practical application of international standards.

28. A draft questionnaire was discussed by the UFG. The following points were made:

- a. The questionnaire will be published on the project website (www.mineclearancestandards.org) on 22 November 1999. Completed questionnaires are to be returned by 17 January 2000.
- b. UNMAS agreed to send the questionnaire to all mine action centres with a covering letter from Chief UNMAS.
- c. GICHD will send the questionnaire to major demining NGOs and commercial contractors.
- d. JMU will use their mine action database to inform 'over 1000' organisations and individuals about the project website, including the questionnaire.
- e. The project manager will prepare a note for the MgM Forum about the project website, inviting organisations and individuals to complete the questionnaire.
- f. JMU will collect and collate the information from the questionnaires. This information will be held in a database with restricted access.
- g. The results of the analysis will be published by the project manager on the project website on 15 February 2000. Thereafter, all detailed records will be destroyed.

29. It is envisaged that the questionnaire will be completed by most organisations and many individuals involved in mine clearance. It was suggested that this 'outreach' would provide an opportunity to ask other questions, not necessarily related to the review of standards. (Afternote: following discussions between the project manager and UNMAS it has been decided not to extend the scope of the questionnaire.)

Staffing and Outreach

30. As stated in Paragraph 13 above, the final stage of the review will involve preparing and staffing the revised standards document. It is planned to brief the document to the Steering Group by 28 April 2000, and to the wider mine action community through a programme of seminars and workshops, commencing late May 2000.

31. The project manager stressed the need for every aspect of the review and revision process to be conducted in an open and transparent manner. Notes of all meetings of the Steering Group, the UFG and working groups should be published and made available to all interested organisations and individuals.

32. A project website is being prepared by GICHD and JMU on behalf of UNMAS. All relevant information will be published on the site, including: the project terms of reference, current standards, revised (draft) standards, minutes of meetings, the questionnaire (and its subsequent analysis), links to other related sites (such as ISO, CEN, WSSN and ITEP), a notice board and a forum for discussion groups.

33. The UFG agreed that the revised standards should be formally approved and endorsed by a recognised international organisation. (As stated in Paragraph 7 above, in the future it may be appropriate for mine clearance standards to be part of ISO, and therefore achieve the authority of an international standard.) The UN would seem to be the most appropriate organization, although some concern was expressed that this may delay the introduction of the new standards. UNMAS agreed to clarify the staffing mechanism within the UN System in order to seek approval and/or endorsement for the new standards. UNMAS also agreed to clarify the arrangements for introducing the new standards, particularly for ongoing UN mine clearance contracts which are based on the current standards.

Other Related Issues

Operational Needs Study

34. Tim Lardner and Matt Craig briefed the UFG on the Operational Needs Study. The aim of the study is to identify (using recognised operational analysis techniques) the tasks and activities which have the greatest impact on the success of mine clearance programmes. So far, the study has focussed on identifying the components of the mine clearance process, and establishing the key relationships between the components (i.e. the development a mine clearance model).

35. The project manager suggested that the review process could take advantage of the Operational Needs Study to list the functions, tasks and activities which (together) comprise mine clearance. Such a list could be used to assess whether standards and/or guidelines exist for all the functions, tasks and activities.

36. The UFG expressed support for the study and suggested that, with some further development, the mine clearance model has potential as a project management tool, perhaps as part of IMSMA.

STANAGs

37. Alan Jones briefed the UFG on the review and development of NATO standards, including STANAGs which may be relevant to the review and revision of mine clearance standards and guidelines. It was noted that NATO was revising its mine clearance certificate and there was therefore an opportunity of harmonising it with the Level 3 format.

38. The need to harmonise some elements of 'humanitarian mine action' and military 'peacekeeping' activities was discussed. The project manager suggested that a standard approach to information including digital mapping and geospatial data may offer the greatest potential for standardisation, at least in the short term. The use of IMSMA in Kosovo is a good example of the military and humanitarian communities adopting common information standards and protocols.

39. The UFG agreed that the review and revision of mine clearance standards should, where appropriate, develop standards and guidelines which will assist joint UN peacekeeping and humanitarian mine clearance operations. Such an approach should improve the overall effectiveness and safety of joint operations.

MgM ROTAR

40. Hendrik Ehlers briefed the UFG on the Rotar trials which were conducted in Namibia in September 1999. He used an interactive CD to summarise the trials and to demonstrate the potential of the Rotar system including the mulcher and grader.

41. The CD presentation was well received by the UFG. It included panoramic views and moving images, and integrated these images with trials data. The use of such a medium should be considered as part of the outreach programme in the final stage of the review and revision process.

Next Meeting of Users' Focus Group

42. The next meeting of the UFG will be held on 3 and 4 February 2000. The project manager will confirm this date by 22 December 1999. (Afternote: the next meeting of the UFG will be held in Geneva on 2 and 3 March 2000.)

THE REVIEW AND REVISION OF MINE CLEARANCE STANDARDS MEETING OF USERS' FOCUS GROUP, 28 & 29 OCTOBER 1999, HARRISONBURG VA, USA

(Those who attended the meeting are marked *)

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