

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

(Prepared by Alan Bryden, GICHD)

## **Introduction**

1. The second meeting of the Users' Focus Group (UFG) was held at the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) on 1-3 March to discuss the review and revision of international mine clearance standards.
2. The meeting had 4 principal objectives.
  - a. To analyse and develop provisional findings on the results of the questionnaire on existing mine clearance standards, based on comments received from mine action centres, major demining NGOs and commercial contractors. This will enable the UFG to identify common concerns, observations and proposals which might influence the scope and conduct of the review.
  - b. To consider and discuss the issue of safety and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) drawing on the report of the working group on PPE standards (WGPPE), established at the last meeting of the UFG.
  - c. To consider and discuss the issue of risk and quality management, drawing on the report of the working group on risk management and mine clearance standards.
  - d. To discuss the value of the ISO approach in the review and revision of international mine clearance standards.
3. The meeting was hosted by the GICHD. Alastair McAslan of GICHD (the project manager) was chairman. A list of attendees, which includes telephone numbers and e-mail addresses, is attached at Annex A.

## **The Questionnaire**

4. Kay Knickrehm and Suzanne Fiederlein (Mine Action Information Center, James Madison University) provided an initial assessment of the responses to the questionnaire. The key points were:
  - a. There were 37 responses to the questionnaire, representing a variety of MACs, governments, NGOs, commercial contractors and other interested organisations.
  - b. There was widespread agreement that international standards for mine clearance are necessary.
  - c. There should be a clearer distinction between standards and guidelines.
  - d. The current standards are supported but need additional detail in order to be useful.
  - e. The questionnaire yielded some significant results for each section of the standards. The questionnaire also yielded extensive written comments on each section. These comments were not analysed by JMU's MAIC, but are held by GICHD and are being used by the Project Manager and Author in the revision of each standard.
  - f. A report on the results of the questionnaire has been posted on the questionnaire page of the [www.mineclearancestandards.org](http://www.mineclearancestandards.org) website.

Alastair McAslan pointed out that most of the organisations approached had responded, so the questionnaire results should be taken as representative.

5. During the discussion, agreement was reached that:

a. Replies to the questionnaire highlight areas that require improvement, but also satisfaction with many other aspects of the existing document – therefore, there is not a mandate to tear up the existing standards and start from scratch.

b. An international standard is not the same as standing operating procedures (SOPs). The revision process should focus on the former, while recognising that the revised international standards should provide an effective tool to help inform the development of national standards and guidelines, and SOPs.

c. The revised international standards must be 'user-friendly' and pitched at the whole community. **The project manager will, in the first instance, identify prevalent themes and trends in the response to the questionnaire in order to draw out comments and recommendations.**

### **Working Group on Personal Protective Equipment (WGPPE)**

6. Alan Jones (Secretary, WGPPE) reminded the UFG of the WGPPE's remit: to make recommendations on standards and guidelines for PPE that would flow into the wider work on a revised international standard. The key goal was to eliminate as many objections as possible to the existing standard from the field. The working group had used the preliminary Database of Demining Incident Victims (DDIV) as source material given that it is the only substantial database on injuries to deminers. An assessment was then made of the nature of PPE necessary for specific tasks and the importance of local environmental factors to the levels of PPE worn.

7. In order to encourage adherence to the revised standard, the working group envisaged a multi-layered legal framework including reference to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention (C155) and related Recommendation (R164) on Occupational Safety and Health. This would provide an extra level of credibility (as well as enforceability) to the revised standard by tying it to existing international law.

8. Some concern was expressed by UFG members as to whether linking the revised standard to the ILO Convention and Recommendation would commit the demining community to obligations beyond those already recognised and accepted by the user community. **The project manager undertook to assess how reference to the ILO should be used from a legal perspective.** This would ensure that there would be no wider implications through adopting the ILO framework beyond its applicability to PPE for humanitarian demining.

9. The UFG heard presentations from Denis Bergeron on the DRES study of blast mine effects and Aris Makris on the issue of overpressure from AP blast mines. Andy Smith presented his own conclusions drawn from the preliminary DDIV. George Zahaczewsky provided an overview of a US DoD OASD (SO/LIC) analysis of the DDIV. (Copies of OASD(SO/LIC)'s report are available from George Zahaczewsky on request.) In the subsequent discussion, the following points were made:

a. A deliverable standard for PPE is one that preserves life, not one that will prevent injury in every instance. Levels must be set that deminers will adhere to – an overly high level of protection may result in some deminers wearing nothing. As regards eye protection, there is evidence that it should be well integrated with frontal protection. There is also evidence that full face protection substantially reduces the risk of secondary fragmentation injuries to the face and eyes.

b. Modeling is often criticised as 'not like real life' but there is real merit in accurate modeling to inform PPE work. Continuous checking of models against field data is a natural, mutually reinforcing process.

c. Scientific data is not conclusive on the question of blast overpressure. Additional effort should be made to encourage practitioners/programme managers to look more closely for the symptoms of injury from blast overpressure.

d. Sometimes deminers and demining supervisors are unwilling to provide information on incidents voluntarily, especially if the incident does not involve any injury. Thought must be given on ways to encourage people to come forward with information, including descriptions of 'near misses'.

e. Although no information can ever be taken as 100% accurate, the DDIV is the only database specific to the humanitarian demining industry. It is important that the database remain current through the establishment of an effective and objective reporting system to update the DDIV.

10. The WGPPE raised the conflicting perspectives on the value of blast-resistant boots. Differing views on their utility were put forward by members of the UFG and consensus was reached that there is insufficient evidence to either fully endorse or discount their value. The door needs to be left open for future R&D on blast resistant boots although, at this stage, it would not be appropriate to include them in a minimum level of PPE.

11. With minor redrafting, agreement was reached in the UFG on the integration of hand-protection and hand-tools within the definition of the PPE requirement, and on the minimum PPE standards agreed in the WGPPE report.

12. The dual-level approach to PPE testing and evaluation recommended in the report, including both formal evaluation and user trials, was also accepted by the UFG. Alastair McAslan pointed out that this approach has the significant benefit of recognising that it is unrealistic for operations in the field to wait for developments in international testing and evaluation – in-country testing is equally important.

(Afternote: As part of the revision of humanitarian demining standards, a guideline will be prepared on testing and evaluation. This will cover general principles and procedures for trials, testing and evaluation. It is anticipated that appropriate standards will be required for each category of equipment, including PPE. These will be developed as required, and should make maximum use of existing ISO standards for testing procedures and protocols.)

13. As stated in Paragraph 8 above, further work is being undertaken to establish the full legal implications of using the ILO approach, including the ILO format, for the revised standard for safety in mine clearance operations.

#### **Working Group on Clearance Standards (WGCS)**

14. Mike McAlpine (Secretary, WGCS) introduced the WGCS paper on the revision of the '99.6% clearance' UN standard. The working group based its recommendation on a two stage process, with procedures and post-clearance Quality Control (QC) sampling as part of a Quality Management System (QMS).

15. The approach recommended by the WGCS included the identification of 'tolerable' risk through using the ISO approved method – the Acceptable Quality Level (AQL). Following accepted international (ISO) practice, compliance with the AQL must be verified through random sampling of the product. The area of cleared land that would need to be sampled is based on a combination of a number of factors: the clearance organisation's quality record, the future use of the land, and the size of the contaminated area.

16. In the subsequent discussion, a number of issues were raised:

a. The system proposed by the working group is designed to ensure a level of confidence in the clearance process and product which is consistent with the intended use of the land. This may be implicit in the existing standard but is not true in practice.

b. There was significant debate over the need for sampling at all, bearing in mind the cost implications for the industry of introducing a mandatory sampling regime. Conversely, it was pointed out that future donor funding will be dependent on the industry becoming more professional – a verification mechanism would be a key aspect of this.

c. There is currently no way to measure the quality of demining work being carried out. Sampling is the only way to provide a level of assurance that the system being employed for demining an area is effective. Moreover, some donors and clients insist on independent sampling.

17. Alastair McAslan concluded that, while there was consensus within the UFG that the principles of sampling were logical, there was a degree of concern over the implications of this approach for the industry. It was proposed that the QC process (and its sampling regime) should be trialled using a 'desk exercise' in order to

understand better the full implications of the proposal The project manager undertook to investigate the options available to carry out this exercise.

(Afternote: Following this exercise, which should take place in early autumn, it may be appropriate to introduce the QMS approach as a Pilot Project in order to flesh out any difficulties, and to develop general support from the User and Donor communities. J.J. van der Merwe suggested that the Iraq Mine Action Programme may be a suitable vehicle for such a Pilot Project.)

18. UNMAS invited Mike McAlpine to present the WGCS proposals to the next meeting (in late May) of the Mine Action Support Group (MASG) in New York.

19. Mike McAlpine also undertook to provide the UFG with a paper considering options for dealing with clearance depth.

### **ISO Support to the Standards Review Process**

20. Hemi Morete (UNMAS) described for the UFG the goal of a framework of mine action standards. UNMAS envisages a suite of complementary documents, tied into the ISO approach to international standards, which would ultimately encompass survey, clearance, mechanical clearance, dogs, BAC standards, minefield management, occupational health and safety and training.

21. Andrew Williams (ISO Secretariat) provided an introduction to the work of the ISO. In particular, he emphasised the flexibility of the ISO approach and the speed that a draft standard, in the form of a Publicly Available Specification (PAS), could be disseminated internationally, and ultimately become a globally accepted standard. Alastair McAslan pointed out that the involvement of the ISO Secretariat would ensure that the revised international standards for mine clearance do not conflict with other existing (and proposed) standards.

22. Bill Van Ree (GICHD) gave an overview of the practical implications of the ongoing work to develop the revised international standard for mine clearance. In the subsequent discussion, the following points were noted and agreed:

- a. On the status of the revised international standard, it was clarified that the work in hand is a revision to the UN standard.
- b. When the first cut of the draft revised standard is ready, it will be sent out to the UFG for comment. A period of two weeks was agreed by the group for this initial phase.
- c. Following agreement of the first draft, the draft revised standard will be put on the project website ([www.mineclearancestandards.org](http://www.mineclearancestandards.org)) for comment from the wider mine action community. Further drafts will be circulated as required before formal submission to the UN.

### **Concluding Remarks**

23. Alastair McAslan stated that, after detailed consideration of the results of the questionnaire, priority areas would be identified in order to identify where refinements to the way forward are required. This may require the establishment of further working groups.

24. According to the ToRs for the UFG, there will be one further meeting of the Group once the revised standard has been agreed via e-mail. The project manager concluded the meeting by reminding the UFG that they are representing the wider mine action community. He requested that their comments and contributions reflect this.

### **Next Meeting of The User's Focus Group**

25. The next meeting of the UFG will take place in June 2000. The exact date, timing and location of the meeting will be confirmed by the UFG Secretary.

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