

TNMA 07.50/01

Second edition

21 June 2023

Practical guidelines on the management of human remains in mine action

Director
United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS)
1 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017
USA

E-mail: mineaction@un.org
Telephone: +1 (212) 963 0691

Website: www.mineactionstandards.org

Warning

This document is current with effect from the date shown on the cover page. As the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) are subject to regular review and revision, users should consult the IMAS project website in order to verify its status at (<http://www.mineactionstandards.org/>, or through the UNMAS website at <http://www.mineaction.org>).

Copyright notice

The International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) are owned, controlled and copyrighted by the United Nations. None of the materials provided in IMAS may be used, reproduced or disseminated, in whole or in part, in any form or by any means, without prior written permission from the United Nations acting through the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), except as set out below. None of the materials in IMAS are to be sold.

The use, reproduction or re-dissemination of IMAS by third parties, in whole or in part, is permitted provided that the United Nations is appropriately attributed and provided also that such use, reproduction or re-dissemination is not for commercial purposes. The United Nations may be attributed by the placement of the following text: Used and reproduced with permission of the United Nations.

Director
United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS)
1 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017
USA

E-mail: mineaction@un.org
Telephone: +1 (212) 963 0691

Website: www.mineactionstandards.org

Contents

1	Scope	1
2	Normative references	1
3	Terms and definitions	1
4	Management of human remains – practical guidance	1
	Annex A (informative) References	3
	Annex B (informative) Assessment of the risks associated with human remains	4
B.1	Assessing the likelihood of encountering human remains	4
B.1.1	General risk for a given national mine action programme	4
B.1.2	Specific risk for a given mine action task	4
B.2	Assessing the safety and occupational health risks associated with human remains	4
	Annex C (informative) Liaison with the relevant authorities	6
	Annex D (informative) Actions when encountering human remains	7
D.1	General	7
D.2	Isolation and marking of human remains	7
D.3	Reporting a discovery of human remains	7
D.4	Photography	9
D.5	Cases when different sets of human remains are encountered	9
D.6	Numbering	9
D.7	Witnesses	9
	Annex E (informative) Management of sites containing human remains	10
	Annex F (informative) Further guidance	11
	Amendment record	12

Foreword

Management practices and operational procedures for mine action are constantly evolving. Improvements are made, and changes are required, to enhance safety and productivity. Changes may come from the introduction of new technology, in response to a new explosive ordnance (EO) threat, and from field experience and lessons learned in other mine action projects and programmes. This experience and lessons learned should be shared in a timely manner.

Technical Notes for Mine Action (TNMAs) provide a forum to share experience and lessons learned by collecting, collating and publishing technical information on important, topical themes, particularly those relating to safety and productivity. TNMAs complement the broader issues and principles addressed in International Mine Action Standards (IMAS).

The preparation of TNMAs follows a rapid production and approval process. They draw on practical experience and publicly available information. Over time, some TNMAs may be “promoted” to become full IMAS standards, while others may be withdrawn if no longer relevant or if superseded by more up-to-date information.

TNMAs are neither legal documents nor IMAS. There is no legal requirement to accept the advice provided in a TNMA. They are purely advisory and are designed solely to supplement technical knowledge or to provide further guidance on the application of IMAS. TNMAs are published on the IMAS website at www.mineactionstandards.org.

Introduction

IMAS 07.50, *Management of human remains in mine action*, specifies the role and responsibilities of the national mine action authority, or the organization acting on its behalf, and the mine action organizations.

This Technical Note for Mine Action (TNMA) provides further guidance and references to support the development of appropriate procedures for the management of human remains in mine action in accordance with IMAS 07.50.

Where relevant, national mine action authorities (NMAA) and mine action organizations are encouraged to incorporate the recommendations and best practices included in this TNMA into their standards and procedures.

It replaces the TNMA 101.10/01 Guidelines on the management of human remains located during mine action operations.

Practical guidelines on the management of human remains in mine action

1 Scope

This TNMA provides further guidance for the implementation of IMAS 07.50 on the management of human remains.

It provides recommendations and best practices on the management of human remains located during mine action operations. It helps preserve the integrity of human remains and facilitate their identification for humanitarian purposes.

2 Normative references

A list of informative references is given in Annex A. Informative references do not form part of the provisions of this technical note but do provide information on the broader scope the topic.

3 Terms and definitions

A complete glossary of all the terms, definitions and abbreviations used in the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) series is given in IMAS 04.10.

In the IMAS series, the words “shall”, “should” and “may” are used to indicate the intended degree of compliance:

- “shall” is used to indicate requirements, methods or specifications that are to be applied in order to conform to the standard. This term is not used in TNMAs, as their contents are purely advisory.
- “should” is used to indicate preferred requirements, methods or specifications; and
- “may” is used to indicate a possible method or course of action.

3.1

national mine action authority

NMAA

government entity, often an inter-ministerial committee, in an EO-affected country charged with the responsibility for broad strategic, policy and regulatory decisions related to mine action

Note 1 to entry: In the absence of an NMAA, it may be necessary and appropriate for the UN, or some other body, to assume some or all of the responsibilities of an NMAA.

3.2

mine action organization

any organization (government, military, commercial or NGO/civil society) responsible for implementing mine action projects or tasks

Note 1 to entry: The mine action organization may be a prime contractor, subcontractor, consultant or agent.

3.3

human remains

fleshed or unfleshed, partially or fully skeletonized body or part of a body of deceased people

4 Management of human remains – practical guidance

The management of human remains, including recovering, storing and identifying remains; issuing death certificates; and authorizing or ordering burials or cremations, is the responsibility of relevant authorities (judicial, police, health, municipal, military, etc.), depending on the context and circumstances. The families of the dead and, often, community and/or religious leaders and authorities, also play a key role in the care, dignified

management and disposal of the remains. In addition, the parties to an armed conflict have some responsibilities in relation to the identification and treatment of the dead under international humanitarian law (IHL):

In accordance with IMAS 07.50:

- it is recommended to assess the risks and safety and occupational health risks associated with human remains;
- mine action organizations are required to mark and report human remains found in the course of their operations;
- mine action organizations are required to document these procedures;
- the NMAA, or the organization acting on its behalf, is required to provide documented instructions to mine action organizations.

Annexes B to E provide practical guidance to support both NMAAs and mine action organizations with regards to:

- the assessment of the risks associated with human remains (Annex B);
- liaison with the relevant authorities (Annex C);
- immediate actions when encountering human remains (Annex D);
- the management of sites containing human remains (Annex E).

In addition to this guidance, the NMAA and mine action authorities may seek appropriate guidance from organizations and individuals specialized in the management of human remains. Annex F references documentation that provides guidance for actions beyond the marking and the reporting of human remains.

Regardless of the circumstances, mine action organizations called on to help manage human remains should always seek and secure all necessary authorizations and clearances. They should also obtain the necessary security guarantees. Failure to do so can result in criminal liability and unnecessary security risks for those involved and the organization they represent. If relevant, the agreement of community leaders and religious authorities and families should also be obtained with regard to how remains are handled and where they are transported.

Note: Unauthorized tampering with a scene of death or handling of human remains is a serious offence in most countries (regardless of the good intentions behind the actions). The corresponding criminal liability can be long-lasting (that is, individuals or organizations may be held accountable long after the offence).

Annex A (informative)

References

The following documents have been referred to in the development of this TNMA or are referred to in its text:

- [1] IMAS 04.10, *Glossary of mine action terms, definitions and abbreviations*
- [2] IMAS 07.50, *Management of human remains*
- [3] IMAS 10.40, *Medical support to demining operations*

Unless covered by separate formal agreements, the provisions of these references are not binding for the users of this TNMA.

The latest version/edition of these references should be used. GICHD holds copies of all references used in this TNMA. A register of the latest version/edition of the IMAS standards, guides and references is maintained by GICHD, and can be found on the IMAS website (www.mineactionstandards.org). National mine action authorities, employers and other interested bodies and organizations should obtain copies before commencing mine action programmes.

The latest version/edition of TNMAs can be accessed via the IMAS website (www.mineactionstandards.org).

Annex B (informative)

Assessment of the risks associated with human remains

As per IMAS 07.50, 4.2, the planning for mine action operations should include an assessment of risks (see IMAS 07.14), and safety and occupational health risk (see IMAS 10.10) associated with human remains. It should cover:

- 1) the likelihood of encountering human remains during operations;
- 2) any specific safety (for example, possible chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear hazard) and occupational health risks, including psycho-social risks related to the exposure of mine action personnel and communities to human remains.

B.1 Assessing the likelihood of encountering human remains

B.1.1 General risk for a given national mine action programme

At the national level, historical data should be used to inform a general assessment. Useful information are:

- data about the number of casualties of a given conflict;
- the location of military operations;
- the location of graves and mass graves.

Specific services dedicated to the treatment of the casualties of a conflict sometimes exist, and can provide information useful for the assessment.

Apart from conflicts, any other event resulting in excess death rate, such as an epidemic or natural disaster, should be assessed.

The time between such events and the implementation of mine action should also be taken into account as it can help assess the potential state of human remains.

To inform the general assessment, funerary rites and practices is another useful information.

B.1.2 Specific risk for a given mine action task

During community liaisons and non-technical surveys, the following information may be collected:

- possible or confirmed presence of human remains, including graveyards and graves;
- information about the sensitivity around the matter of human remains may also be collected.

B.2 Assessing the safety and occupational health risks associated with human remains

The NMAA, or the organization acting on its behalf, and mine action organizations may seek subject matter expertise to assess the following risks:

- the risk of human remains affecting the environment, including water;
- the risk of human remains containing infectious agents;
- the risk of psychosocial trauma of the mine action staff.

Regarding the risk of psychosocial trauma, IMAS 10.40 indicates minimum requirements and recommendations concerning mental health. The risk associated with encountering human remains should be included in a mental health assessment so that measures can be taken to prepare staff for this possibility.

Mine action organizations should ensure that all staff involved in or affected by an encounter with human remains are counseled and monitored.

Mine action organizations may specifically train focal points in:

- debriefing a traumatic event; and
- recognizing signs of trauma.

Psychosocial trauma support may be included in the insurance mine action organizations subscribe.

Annex C (informative)

Liaison with the relevant authorities

As per IMAS 07.50, 5.1, it is the responsibility of the NMAA, or the organization acting on its behalf, to liaise with the competent authorities and relevant organizations concerning the management of human remains.

The NMAA, or the organization acting on its behalf, should provide the following information to the mine action organizations:

- the relevant authority to contact when human remains are found;
- the procedure and details to contact this authority (phone number, email address, address for in-person reporting).

If different authorities are relevant depending on the situation (e.g. different territorial competences), the NMAA should also indicate these details to mine action organizations.

The time for the relevant authority to deploy to the scene should also be assessed. The mine action organization may take additional measures accordingly to preserve the human remains.

When identifying the relevant authority, the NMAA, or the organization acting on its behalf, may consider the following:

- in many cases, the findings of human remains are first considered as a criminal case. The NMAA, or the organization acting on its behalf, should liaise with the Ministry of the Interior, or its equivalent, in order to confirm competent authority and the procedure to follow in the case human remains are discovered.
- in the case of an ongoing conflict, the competent authority may be outside the Ministry of the Interior. The NMAA, or the organization acting on its behalf, should identify in advance the competent authority and confirm the procedure to follow in case human remains are discovered. The responsibilities of parties to armed conflict in relation to the dead are included in the Geneva Conventions and customary international humanitarian law.

The identification of the relevant authority is also the opportunity to identify any applicable legal, regulatory and normative requirements (see IMAS 07.50, 4.2).

Annex D (informative)

Actions when encountering human remains

D.1 General

As per IMAS 07.50, 4.2, when encountering human remains during a technical survey or clearance operation, the mine action organization is required to:

- immediately report the finding and its location to the relevant authority;
- isolate and mark the human remains in order to preserve them until such a time that the relevant authority is informed and able to take action;

D.2 Isolation and marking of human remains

- 1) Immediately cease any action that disturbs, could disturb or damage the remains.
- 2) Install a marking to warn about the presence of human remains in order to prevent the entry of people into the area where the human remains are located. In order to avoid confusion, this marking should be different from:
 - a) the marking used to indicate the presence of an SHA or CHA, or isolated explosive ordnance (see IMAS 08.40); and
 - b) the marking used within hazardous areas by demining organizations.

The quality of the marking should be defined based on the foreseen time between the finding and the treatment of human remains by the competent authority.

This guidance also applies to any artifacts located with the human remains.

D.3 Reporting a discovery of human remains

Information provided should be succinct and based on direct findings; there should be no analysis or speculation.

The instruction provided by the NMAA, or the organization acting on its behalf, should specify:

- how the finding is to be reported;
- the type of information to be reported;
- to whom the finding should be reported.

As a minimum, immediate reporting should include:

- 1) the date and time of the finding;
- 2) the location of the finding, ideally with grid reference obtained using a GPS;
- 3) possible routes of approach to the site with regards to explosive ordnance risks;
- 4) the confirmed or potential risk of the presence of explosive ordnance with the human remains.

Normally, collecting and reporting further information is the responsibility of the authority competent for the management of human remains. However, it can be necessary for mine action organizations to collect additional information when the relevant authority does not exist or is unavailable.

When no relevant authority can detail reporting requirements, and for subsequent reporting, the following may be added:

- 1) the time and date of the recording, and the name(s) and contact details of the person(s) doing the recording;
- 2) a description of the scene, including the location and distance of the remains in relation to other features and landmarks. Describe any obvious disturbance to the remains by people, animals or birds, environmental factors, etc.;
- 3) a reference number assigned to the set of remains. Where no national numbering system exists, the NMAA should establish its own numbering system (see D.6);
- 4) the season, average temperature, weather conditions and environment;
- 5) the circumstances of the discovery (for example, found during survey, demining operations) and whether the remains are in or close to a hazardous area. Guides may be necessary to lead personnel recovering the remains to avoid inadvertent entry into hazardous areas;
- 6) information on whether the remains been inadvertently disturbed by demining and, if so, under which circumstances (for example, remains were initially buried, limited visibility due to dust or debris or remains were obscured by vegetation, etc.);
- 7) information on whether the remains are complete. If incomplete, explain what parts are present and the degree of certainty that the remains are human (certain, possible, uncertain). Unless it is certain that the remains are human, they should be referred to as possibly human;
- 8) information on whether the remains appear to be recent or old. Include a description of their degree of decomposition (not decomposed, putrefied, partially decomposed/skeletonized, fully decomposed/skeletonized – that is, with no soft tissues);
- 9) information on whether the remains appear to be those of an adult or a child. Explain why;
- 10) information on whether the remains appear to be those of a male or female. Explain why;
- 11) information on whether the remains appear to be those of a combatant or a civilian person. Explain why (uniform visible, ID tag, weapon/ammunition found nearby, etc.);
- 12) if the remains appear to be those of a military person, give details to aid identification, including any visible affiliation, such as uniform, ID tag (name, rank, unit, etc.);
- 13) information on whether the remains are believed to be linked to a particular incident. Describe the incident;
- 14) as many details as possible about the remains (tattoos, birthmarks, etc.) and the associated evidence of identity, including clothing and apparent personal belongings (type of shoes, fabric of clothing, glasses, jewelry, watches, etc.);
- 15) any other relevant information that might be useful for the examination and eventual identification of the remains in the context (for example, apparent injuries);
- 16) date of the report;
- 17) signature.

The mine action organization should keep a copy of such reports.

D.4 Photography

If permitted, the scene should be photographed and/or filmed, including:

- 1) panoramic shots;
- 2) close-ups of relevant features (facial features, personal items, etc);
- 3) a scale and a tag with the date for reference;
- 4) tags number or code assigned to the remains.

D.5 Cases when different sets of human remains are encountered

A separate record should be prepared for each set of remains. If necessary, one record can be provided for a general description of a finding of multiple human remains, and individual forms attached to it.

D.6 Numbering

The reference number assigned to a particular set of human remains and associated evidence (personal effects) should be the same throughout the process, until the body or body parts and personal effects have been identified and released (returned to the family, for administrative disposal, etc.). Any files, bags, boxes and temporary burial sites used should also be clearly tagged or marked using the same reference number.

Where no national numbering system exists, the NMAA should establish its own numbering system. To develop such a numbering system, the NMAA may use the following guidance.

- 1) A unique code should include text and a sequential number. Do not use a simple number alone as this may be easily duplicated and cause confusion.
- 2) Unique body codes must not be duplicated.
- 3) Prior agreement on a standard approach to creating unique body codes is recommended.
- 4) An example of a unique body code is a composite of the three following items, although other methodologies exist:
 - a) the date when the human remain was found;
 - b) the name of the place where the human remain was found;
 - c) the name of the team which located the human remain; and
 - d) a number.
- 5) Inclusion of the specific place where the human remain was found is important as it will assist with future identification efforts.
- 6) The unique body code must also be included in all photographs and should accompany all data collected from the human remain, including forms and associated evidence.

D.7 Witnesses

In case witnesses spontaneously engage with the mine action organization, they should be referred to the relevant authorities.

Annex E (informative)

Management of sites containing human remains

The security of sites where human remains are found is normally the responsibility of the relevant authorities. However, if the remains were found on sites affected by mine action operations, then the security of sites with regards to explosive ordnance may remain the responsibility of the concerned mine action organization. This should be directed by the NMAA.

Depending on the requirements of the NMAA and the location of the remains, the mine action organization may also have the additional responsibility of providing demining support to the authority recovering the remains.

The mine action organization is responsible for preserving the human remains until the relevant authority deploys on site.

If the time needed for the authority to deploy on site is short, the mine action organization may not need to take steps other than marking the area where the human remains are located.

If the time needed for the authority to deploy on site is longer, the mine action organization may need to take reasonable actions in addition to the marking of the area where the human remains are located. Below are some examples.

- The mine action organization may place screens (for example, vehicle placed so as to restrict views on the site), privacy systems or tents and restrict the access to the scene. This will prevent the public and other staff members from viewing human remains to avoid arousing curiosity, exposing people to unnecessary visual trauma or causing public disorder.
- In case the local population reacts to the findings of human remains, the mine action organization may engage with the local population through community liaison.
- The mine action organization may place protection, such as a tent, to protect the human remains from the rain, wind or sun.

When the operation outside the marked area where the human remains are located continues, the requirements detailed in clause 4.1. of the IMAS 07.50 apply.

Annex F (informative)

Further guidance

In case the NMAA, or the organization acting on its behalf, and mine action organizations undertake actions beyond the immediate marking and reporting of human remains, additional guidance is necessary.

In accordance with IMAS 07.50, when mine action organizations are requested to support a human recovery operation, the NMAA, or the organization acting on its behalf, is required to provide documented instructions (for example, national mine action standards and/or any instruction from the competent authorities) on operational actions to be taken, in line with applicable legal, regulatory and normative requirements

It is possible that such guidance already be detailed in local legal, regulatory and normative documents.

If needed, such guidance is also available in the following publications by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC):

- ICRC, [*Operational best practices regarding the management of human remains and information on the dead by non-specialists*](#), April 2004. Available in English, French, Arabic, Spanish and Russian;
- ICRC. [*The recovery of human remains in weapon-contaminated settings*](#). Sept. 2020. Available in English, French, Arabic, Spanish and Russian.

Among others, these publications provide guidance for the storage and transportation of human remains, the emergency burial of human remains or the planning of joint mine action and forensic operations to recover human remains in contaminated areas.

In the absence of a relevant authority or of relevant documents, the NMAA, or the organization acting on its behalf, and mine action organizations should seek advice from specialized organizations or individuals.

Amendment record

Management of IMAS amendments

The IMAS series of standards are subject to formal review on a three-yearly basis. However, this does not preclude amendments being made within these three-year periods for reasons of operational safety and efficiency or for editorial purposes.

As amendments are made to this IMAS they are given a number. The date and general details of the amendment shown in the table below. The amendment is also shown on the cover page of the IMAS by the inclusion under the edition date of the phrase "*incorporating amendment #.*"

As the formal reviews of each IMAS are completed, new editions may be issued. In this case, amendments up to the date of the new edition are incorporated into the new edition and the amendment record table cleared. Recording of amendments then starts again until a further review is carried out.

The most recently amended IMAS are posted on the IMAS website at www.mineactionstandards.org.

Number	Date	Amendment details