

Mine Risk Education



Who is injured by landmines?

It is often assumed that people step on mines because of bad luck. In fact, the reasons for mine accidents vary greatly from place to place and audience to audience, but they tend to fall into four basic categories:

Unaware: A person knows nothing about mines or safe behavior.

Uninformed: A person knows about landmines, but not about appropriate safe behaviors.

Reckless: The person knows about mines and appropriate behavior, but approaches mines or UXO anyway; for example, a child throwing stones at a mine or adventure-seeking teenagers entering a dangerous area.

Forced: The person knows of the risk and the appropriate behaviors, but must enter a dangerous area as a survival necessity (the most common cause of accidents).

What is mine risk education (MRE)?

MRE seeks to alter people's perceptions of the land and their relationship to it. The aim is to change the high-risk behavior of those living or working in areas affected by explosive weapons of war, especially landmines, booby-traps or UXO (e.g., unexploded bombs or shells).

How do you change people's behavior?

Changing behavior in an at-risk population is a complex problem. The process must begin, however, by learning from community members how they survive from day to day and helping them find alternatives to entering dangerous areas or touching UXO.

Why is MRE important to mine action?

MRE has an important role to play within mine action as a whole. As MRE personnel work in close collaboration with affected communities, they collect large amounts of information that can help to set priorities for mine clearance, marking, and



removal of minefields and ensure that the victims of these weapons receive the assistance and support they need. MRE is not a 100-percent solution, but when done properly and in close conjunction with the other disciplines of mine action, it can provide much-needed protection to the civilians who suffer most from these weapons.

A mine risk education team teaches children the dangers of landmines in Amran-Aden, Yemen.

How do educators determine the best way to reach a given group of people?

A great deal of assessment is required when determining the feasibility of MRE projects, and it is extremely important to analyze a myriad of factors before committing to a strategy. A proper needs assessment is the first step in the establishment of an ongoing information collection system. Once a thorough analysis is conducted, the information collected in the needs assessment phase is used as the basis of program planning and strategizing. Posters and radio and TV ads are sometimes used but they are only part of the solution. Education in its purest form requires a two-way exchange and acceptance of information; ideally, it is



Mine risk education in Lahej, Yemen.

participatory and active rather than passive. The MRE messages must be not only disseminated, but also absorbed.

What communication approaches are used in MRE?

There are many different techniques that can be used in a community-level program, depending primarily on the experiences and the style of learning of the target audience. MRE campaigns variously employ training, lectures and participatory activities. Puppet shows, role playing, board games and poster contests are just a few interactive approaches that have been used successfully.

Who does MRE?

Many programs focus on training community workers or local MRE instructors that will have the widest impact. Training can be done in a somewhat short period of time at relatively low cost, and a community educator will be far more valuable than a mine clearance professional. Since training marks the first step in a continuing relationship between the community and the program and represents the single biggest effort in program management, it

should be allocated the time and resources it deserves.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of traditional classroom-style instruction?

Sometimes known disparagingly as "chalk and talk," this method is by far the most common educational process in the developing world. It represents the simplest form of communication, but discourages participation and development of problem-solving skills, and tends to result in only marginal retention. That said, however, it will undoubtedly be the approach most familiar to and comfortable for the audience. Therefore, classroom-style

Challenges for MRE

LITERACY: Among the most challenging aspects of community education in the developing world are low levels of literacy and lack of familiarity with a variety of communication approaches, especially among agrarian populations, which are often most vulnerable.

GEOGRAPHY: In areas where there are few roads and even fewer vehicles, the ability to spread information is drastically curtailed and becomes one of the largest impediments to a successful campaign. This increases the need for programs that use local networks and patterns and are not overly reliant on outside intervention.

CONFLICT: Ongoing conflict can disrupt transportation and draw away resources for MRE. It also commonly restricts access to affected populations and disrupts mine action in general. Conflict in an area also affects the educator's ability to provide risk-reducing information, particularly if new mines are being used.

MOVEMENT: Internally displaced people and refugees are often the most needy and at greatest risk. Often on the move, these groups usually lack critical knowledge about local conditions, presenting a unique challenge for MRE.

instruction should not be discounted entirely, but used in the introduction phase to put people at ease and then slowly diminished.

What is the best way to engage people in MRE?

Participatory approaches to learning and the use of visual aids are the most effective ways of transferring knowledge about safe behavior in dangerous areas. Participatory approaches are especially important for settled communities facing a long-term mine threat and exhibiting high-risk behavior. When properly conducted, participatory approaches can mobilize the community, including children, through locally acceptable modes of communication. However, they require highly skilled and well-trained staff and significant human and financial investments by program donors and supporters.

What messages are used in MRE programs?

Messages must be targeted to the populations most at risk and focused on the reasons for mine incidents, rather than merely adapted from those used in a previous mine risk program—even in a neighboring country. Messages may include the following:

- Be able to identify mines
- Keep out of mined areas
- Do not touch mines/UXO
- Stay on the safe path
- Avoid areas likely to contain mines and UXO
- Recognize warning signs
- Recognize warning clues
- Whom to report the location of mines/UXO for safe removal

MRE in Action

In Nagorno Karabakh, Azerbaijan, a working group on mine/UXO issues that includes representatives of the local media and the relevant ministries (defense, education, health, etc.) meets regularly to plan and coordinate mine action activities. Community-based steps, focusing on identification of solutions by the community in relation to its mine/UXO problem, are being developed in affected villages. In collaboration with the Ministry of Education, MRE is included in the school curriculum.

In Kosovo, a community-based program was launched in which special attention was placed on building a capacity in the local community. This included close integration with clearance agencies and working with children through interactive projects, including an open-air play based on the story of Little Red Riding Hood. Many communities benefited from these programs, and activities in dangerous areas are ongoing.

A billboard next to a village pond warns children not to play with unexploded bombs.

