

Ethics and Compliance Assessment of De-mining Operational Activities

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the ethical aspects of de-mining research and development within Framework Programme 7 (FP7) Project D-BOX (*Comprehensive toolbox for humanitarian clearing of large civil areas from anti-personal landmines and cluster munitions*); it presents the methodology and results of an ethics and compliance assessment of operational demining activities, and the underlying aspects relating to the protection of the environment, ethics and cultural differences in the field.

Introduction

The FP7 Integration Project D-BOX (*Comprehensive toolbox for humanitarian clearing of large civil areas from anti-personal landmines and cluster munitions*) addresses the development of innovative solutions integrated in a comprehensive toolbox providing tools, methods and procedures to improve the effectiveness of clearing mines. D-BOX, asserts equal importance to the ethical aspects of de-mining as to technical aspects of tools and sensors that comprise the Toolbox. Ethical based deliverables include (i) an Ethics Aid Memoire to include an ethical impact assessment leading to an ethics behaviour protocol for de-mining operatives and managers for establishing and maintaining trusting and productive relationships; (ii) Cultural guidelines; (iii) Error prevention methodology for tools and techniques and (iv) Protocols for ethical issues.

Ethics and compliance assessment of operational activities; methodological aspects

CBRNE Ltd, (Work Package 3 Lead), applies as methodology literature reviews alongside an analysis of codes of conduct, internal compliance and a number of targeted interviews based on questionnaires. A robust filtering and analytical process underlines evidence and recommendations from the meta-evaluation process.

A research framework based on International Mine Action Standards, IMAS³⁹, focuses on mine action safety, occupational health, use and care of dogs, protection of the environment, relations with local communities and ethical and cultural issues. We used the Likert scale (1 to 6) for measuring levels of satisfaction, and questions to find ethical and cultural issues. Two questionnaires targeted management and operational staff. The latter in January 2013 in the Falkland Islands where 21 people (14 de-miners, 1 x ops manager, 2 x supervisors, 2 x team leaders and 2 x medics) were asked to fill in questionnaires and two were interviewed as part of that process for a period of 30 minutes each.

Results and discussion

The responders were explicitly told to reply with reference to their overall experience within the demining industry and not their present assignment. The average years spent in the industry varied between 12 and 17 years with only two de-miners having just one year's experience, the Falklands being their first deployment. Operational areas included Zimbabwe, Cyprus, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Congo, Sudan, South Africa, Mozambique, Kuwait, Croatia, Iraq, Eritrea and the Falklands.

The level of satisfaction regarding standards for safe workplace, machinery, equipment, safe-work practices, provision of Personal Protection Equipment, supervision and training, health care and emergency medical support is very high: 18 people responded with levels of satisfaction from 4 to 6 on the Likert scale (satisfied, very satisfied, totally satisfied). One unsatisfied de-miner with 1 years' experience justified his answer with the remark: “PPE cannot prevent injuries so I want total protection”; the ops manager suggested that “Prodders and trowls need improving for different terrain”.

Twelve respondents were unaware of the opportunity for Safety and Occupational Health representation. All were aware of

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³⁹ <http://www.mineactionstandards.org/international-standards/imas-in-english/list-of-imas/>; Paktian (2012), (Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining), describe the relations between IMAS, NMAS and SOP: 'The IMAS are the mine action community standards endorsed by the United Nations (UN). Designed to improve safety and efficiency and promote a common and consistent approach to the conduct of mine action operations. The aim of the IMAS is to assist National Mine Action Authorities (NMAA) in the development of National Mine Action Standards (NMAS) and as a source for the development of SOPs and training material. The authors state in practice, many mine action organisations establish Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs) based on IMAS's requirements, knowing that when the SOPs are IMAS compliant they will be NMAS compliant with only moderate amendments.

the availability of Safety and Work procedure documents (*Project Health and Safety Plan/Medical Evacuation Plan/ Environmental Plan and SOPs*) via supervisors; They had all received refresher training on these subjects; one medic advised in most cases he is the chosen representative, and the operational manager said in most cases it is not a committee but one person that acts as the delegate representative. Just three of the responders were unaware of the existence of a code of conduct, but some associate the code of conduct with relationships in the chain of command.

Dogs are used on average two out of five engagements and respondents considered standards of care as consistently high.

There were three references to environmental impact: 2 intentional bush fires; one without an impact study in Zimbabwe and large excavations left un-reinstated in Afghanistan with a recommendation from one respondent that disturbed vegetation should be restored as standard practice.

Three respondents said they had been confronted with cultural, human behaviour or ethical issues during the last 5 operations: one made reference to the “racism problem - black are ill-treated”); another underlined the cultural and religious differences saying “Islamic countries, for example Lebanon, are very sensitive to their culture and religion” - *i.e. difficult countries to work in*; one de-miner remarked on the remuneration rates for long hours of work with the comment “For a de-miner to spend 9 hours (working) is too much for this type of job”.

Our research is on-going; these results are partial and have to be correlated with answers from future surveys; but they show the level of ethics and compliance in demining companies is high, the employees are satisfied with the implementation of standards and that even if not all operational staff are fully aware of codes of conduct, there are few ethical issues.

References

Paktian F, (2012) , ‘Relationship between IMAS, NMAS and SOPs’, *The Journal of ERW and mine action*, issue 16.3, <http://cisr.jmu.edu/journal/16.3/notes/paktian.htm>, accessed on 22.03.2013.