

UNEXPLODED ORDNANCE (UXO) SAFETY

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Introduction

On September 28, 1998, a three-person Defense Special Weapons Agency (DSWA) team entered White Sands Missile Range for the purpose of performing tests. The DSWA team had apparently parked in a pullout area along a range road and was setting up to run their tests. There were three team members; a Captain (O-3), a Staff Sergeant (E-5), and an Airman (E-2). All members were from the Air Force. The incident occurred just 15 feet off a range road. The Airman, three weeks out of basic training, was the fatality. During a break in the testing, he wandered away from his team: exploring. He picked-up an intriguing object on the ground. After checking it out, his curiosity satisfied, he tossed it to the ground. That's when it detonated. He sustained massive, fatal injuries to his arms, lower abdomen and legs. The investigation confirmed he had picked up a BLU-97 Combined Effects Munition. Although the last recorded use of that munition on the range was in 1986, the decade-old BLU-97 functioned as designed.

Our goal in providing this session is to prevent you, and your work parties, from becoming the subject of the introduction for the next UXO safety briefing. This session will provide you the information necessary to develop a healthy respect for unexploded ordnance (UXO), and arm you with the sufficient knowledge to recognize the potential hazards and to stay safe when in UXO-contaminated areas.

Discussion

The four-part session begins with munitions terminology – including basic ordnance components. We then highlight important explosive safety concepts and move on to outline some basic considerations for personnel visiting an explosives-contaminated site. The majority of the session is ordnance recognition. Using a combination of training aids and color slides; military EOD team members will walk you through the many types of ordnance frequently found at bombing and gunnery ranges.

The best way to be safe is to AVOID the hazards. *This is NOT training as a UXO technician, and it is NOT qualification to touch or move UXO.* Avoidance (*"If you didn't drop it – Don't pick it up!"*) is the focus of the session.

DoD and USAF safety rules require that all personnel visiting a range receive a safety briefing for that specific range prior to entering – regardless of the work or observation to be done. This briefing is designed to provide a basic understanding of explosives safety relating to unexploded ordnance and supplement (not replace) the specific safety briefings required prior to entering a specific range.

References

1. DoD 6055.9-STD, Explosive Safety Standards
2. AFI 21-201, USAF Explosive Safety Standards
3. Defense Environmental Network and Information Exchange (DENIX), UXO Safety Education website.
4. UXOINFO.com "Photo Gallery" website.
5. Interstate Technology Regulatory Council (ITRC), "UXO Basic Training Course."