

Munitions Disposal a Huntsville Center Priority as U.S. Units Depart Afghanistan

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As U.S. units prepare to depart Afghanistan, military leaders must determine whether to send their excess munitions home or if it is safer and/or more cost effective to destroy them in country. The Joint Munitions Disposal - Afghanistan (JMD-A) team from the U.S. Army Engineering and Support Center, Huntsville, supports those units by disposing of U.S. and NATO Condition Code H unserviceable and "do-not-return" munitions, as well as captured enemy munitions and explosive remnants of war (ERW).

"Some of the munitions have been out at forward locations for more than 10 years; a lot of times they've been in open storage exposed to the elements or have been rucked around on patrol by the troops," said Chase Hamley, JMD-A project manager in Huntsville Center's Ordnance and Explosives Directorate (OE) International Operations (IO) Division. "Things happen along the way that makes them unserviceable. In addition, there are a lot of situations where shipping the munitions back to the U.S. costs more than the items do in new condition."

More than 3,575 tons of ammunition have been destroyed in Afghanistan to date as a result of U.S. military forces moving in and out of the country, according to Bob Britton, JMD-A lead program manager in the IO Division.

It is the military leaders and their staffs who identify what munitions are to be disposed of, said Hamley, adding that the list of excess and do-not-return munitions is consolidated and maintained at the Pentagon level. The JMD-A team coordinates disposal efforts with the military units and manages the munitions disposal contract with Sterling Global Operations Inc., headquartered in Lenoir City, Tenn., which specializes in demining, clearance of explosive remnants of war and management of ammunition physical security and stockpiles.

The contractor receives the ordnance from the military units at a designated ammunition point and logs all munitions received not only in its database but also in the military's tracking system. Once the contractor constructs demolition "shots" out of the items they've received, Hamley said military and contract employees execute the movement to a range and conduct the demolition operation - such as open burning or detonation - according to the type of munitions.

Ensuring safety and complete detonation of every shot is a very technical process.

"Our ordnance and explosive safety specialists continually review their procedures, and review the contractor's demo plans before every shot to ensure compliance and effectiveness," said Hamley, in Afghanistan on his seventh deployment. The lead program manager in country, Keith Angles, is a retired lieutenant colonel on his 10th deployment. Working together, contract personnel, safety

specialists and JMD-A staff have streamlined the entire process and created operating procedures they strictly adhere to that account for minimum safe distances based on the amount of and type of ordnance being disposed of and considerations at each location.

The final step: the contractor issues a demolition consumption report capturing each item disposed of and reconciles the database to ensure thorough reporting and accounting for all munitions identified for destruction.

Huntsville Center OE teams were first involved in captured enemy ammunition disposal in Iraq from 2003 to 2006, then transitioned their expertise to coalition munitions clearance and disposal programs through 2011, destroying more than 400,000 tons of ammunition in Iraq, according to Britton, who was part of the coalition munitions clearance team in Iraq.

The team brought that experience to Afghanistan in 2009, first performing mine clearance in support of military construction efforts then expanding into joint munitions disposal in 2012.

The members of the IO team have hundreds of years of combined experience making them an invaluable asset for the Army in Afghanistan, and joint munitions disposal is just one of their missions. Also part of the IO Division, Operation Task Force Power performs low voltage electrical inspections of all facilities occupied by U.S. Forces in Afghanistan and provides fire safety inspections and training. The division also manages environmental remediation and environmental footprint reduction programs, as well as range and battle area clearance activities in Afghanistan.

"We've got world class employees with expertise in a wide array of specialties, including EOD operations, combat zone experience, strategic management, contracting, project management and auditing," Hamley said. "Everyone is important to what we do, and everyone supports the mission to the maximum extent possible."

The three primary JMD-A team members rotate back and forth from Alabama to Afghanistan on six- or 12-month deployments. The stateside team member completes staff actions, requests funding and provides project estimates, keeps contract task orders in place, builds requirements and develops contracts for follow-on work, fields questions and helps solve any issues that arise - basically helps keep the program running for the guys on the ground, said Britton, who recently returned from his seventh deployment.

While each team member might have his individual reasons for deploying, the main reason is supporting Soldiers, according to Hamley. "Most of us have been the guy on the ground and know what impact we're having."

"We took the Army Corps of Engineers campaign goal 'Support the Warfighter' to heart," added Britton. "We are helping the Soldiers on the ground accomplish an incredibly important mission. Our team strives to find ways we can solve challenges, fulfill a need the Army has and make a difference with the expertise we've gained."

Photos: (Courtesy Joint Munitions Disposal-Afghanistan)



Joint Munitions Disposal-Afghanistan personnel build an ammunition shot box and place C-4 over the unserviceable ammo scheduled to be destroyed, paying particular attention to the continuity of the explosives and ammo. It is then taped in place for extra security from movement to the range for demolition.



Personnel supporting joint munitions disposal operations in Afghanistan are delinking .50 caliber rounds, or taking them out of their links, and placing them loosely in cans for later burning in the

incinerator, the approved method for disposal.