

The first task a newly stabilized country faces is cleaning up land mines. Traditional land mines are cleared in a variety of ways. In large open areas, tracked vehicles with flailing chains can clear most mines. In less accessible or poorer areas, the old-fashioned metal detector is used. Some new Scheibel-type models can detect many plastic versions. Some countries use the old-fashioned method of probing at a shallow angle with knives. Sniffing dogs can be used, along with a raft of new high-tech methods employing radar, sonar, thermal neutron, microwave, and even satellites. For now, most mines are detected and dug up the old-fashioned way, by hand, or the painful way—by foot. Wildly speculative estimates on the costs to remove the world's land mines come in at about \$33 billion.

There were 7 million land mines laid in Iraq and Kuwait before and during the Gulf War. Kuwait spent \$800 million clearing out land mines after the Gulf War.

It costs between \$500 and \$2,000 per mine to remove them. A few years ago, 80,000 to 100,000 mines were removed around the world at a cost of \$100 million. To remove all the mines in the world, it would cost \$58 billion. Unfortunately, 2 to 5 million mines are put in the ground every year.

A DP reader who spends much of his time in mined areas while working for the UN Rapid Response Unit has sent in these tips:

## WHEEL OF MISFORTUNE

### HOW TO AVOID LAND MINES

1. Never be the first on the road in the early morning. Most mines are laid at night to surprise regular convoys or patrols. Try to follow heavy trucks. Keep at least 200 yards behind, but do not lose sight of the truck.
2. Never take point. (Let others start walking or driving before you.) Keep a distance of at least 60 to 100 feet to avoid shrapnel. If someone is wounded by a mine, apply a tourniquet immediately to the damaged limbs to prevent death by blood loss. Carry a wound kit and IV equipment if you can.
3. If a mine goes off, DO NOT RUN. Stay where you are, and walk backward in your own tracks. Retrieve the victim by following their tracks, but only if you are feeling lucky.
4. In heavily mined areas, NEVER leave the pavement (even to take a leak). If you must turn your vehicle around, do so on the pavement.

5. If you have a flak jacket or bulletproof vest, wear it when walking and sit on it when driving.
6. Know the local mining strategy of the combatants. Do they place mines in potholes (as in northeastern Somalia) or on the off-road tracks made by vehicles avoiding potholes (as in Rwanda, Burundi, and Congo)? Ask the locals: Do they booby trap? Are they dropped by air? Do they mine rivers? Use trip wires? What about UXO?
7. Mines are usually planted at a shallow depth, with their detonators requiring downward pressure. When trapped in a minefield, and only as a last resort, mines can be probed using a long knife or rod inserted at a very shallow angle and with a very gentle touch. If you live in the area, do not touch or remove the mine, but mark it for later removal or detonation. Red-painted stones or a barrier of sticks with fabric is the third-world method of marking mines.
8. Never touch unusual or suspicious objects. Bodies, money, a camera, or even your own equipment may have been booby-trapped at night or in your absence.
9. Travel with all windows open and preferably with doors off or in the back of a pickup truck. This will relieve some of the blast when you hit a mine.
10. If you have reason to believe that there has been mine activity (new digging, unusual tire tracks, or footprints), mark the area with a skull and crossbones and the local or English word "MINES." Red-painted rocks are another common method of identifying mine areas. Notify local and/or foreign authorities.

## IN A DANGEROUS PLACE: KABUL

### THE MINEFIELDS (MARCH 1997)

They say that Kabul is the most destroyed city on Earth. I am sure it is. I am getting used to driving by mile after mile of destroyed office flats, elegant buildings, and brick houses. The factions of Dostum, Masoud, and Hekmatyar duked it out until the Taliban kicked them out. All you hear now is the odd rocket attack and of course the occasional accidental detonation of a mine.

But that's why I was here, to understand about mines and the people who clear them. I had spent a week with the demining dogs: big, burly German shepherds and Belgium Malanoise handled by big, burly Afghans.

The Afghans had to grow beards under Taliban rule, and they looked odd with their U.S.-army-green uniforms. The demining program used to be run by Americans and when the money and supplies