



MAG ROAD USAGE GUIDELINES

During the course of the conflict in Angola, the use of anti-vehicle mines and improvised explosive devices along roads became increasingly widespread, for a number of reasons, including the extensive involvement of external forces with armoured military vehicles, and the deliberate tactics by UNITA forces of limiting “extensions to state authority” in the latter stages of the war by seeking to isolate populations through the blockage of roads and destruction of bridges.

This has resulted in a situation where the threat from mines and improvised devices along Angola’s roads is one of the highest in the world, and therefore requires special attention from the humanitarian community, local authorities and people involved in extensive road use, such as freight or transport companies.

MAG has developed a set of Road Usage Guidelines that identify some key methods by which the risk from mines can be reduced while using roads in Angola. All senior staff within institutions such as those mentioned above should be aware of these guidelines and MAG recommends they are integrated into regular driver training and awareness-raising. In MAG’s area of operations in eastern Angola, regular Mine Risk Education sessions are provided to drivers on request.

GUIDELINE 1: UNDERTAKE PRE-TRAVEL PLANNING

The status of roads changes constantly as traffic increases, and particularly during the transition from wet to dry season and back again. It is vital that prior to travel along routes being used for the first time, or that you have not travelled on for several months, that the status of the road is checked.

This can best be done through visiting a mine action agency active in the area that has conducted route assessments and has reports about the road in question. If no route assessment has been conducted, a request can be made to undertake a route assessment.

The UN agency responsible for conducting road assessments is UNSECOORD, and holds records on the status of roads throughout Angola. Although MAG does not use the “green-yellow-red” system of road classification, these reports provide useful information about road conditions, distances and so on.

Always gather information about the status of roads prior to making the decision to travel.

GUIDELINE 2: ESTABLISH COMMUNICATION PROCEDURES

Given the possibility of incidents along roads in Angola, either involving mines or regular road traffic accidents, it is vital that effective communications procedures are established between the vehicle(s) and the base. This includes:

- Ensuring the vehicle has working HF/VHF radios
- Making a journey plan that is agreed by the supervisor at the base and is distributed to the relevant contact point, such as the Radio Operator. The journey plan will include expected travel times, routes to be used, and return times.
- Agreed contact times between the vehicle and the base
- Agreed procedures for what happens if contact times are missed
- Contact details (e.g. radio frequencies) of mine action agencies operating in the region held within the vehicle in the event of a mine incident

Ensure Communication Procedures are in place, understood and utilized



GUIDELINE 3: STAY IN THE TRACKS

MAG's experience of investigating reports of anti-vehicle mines and of investigating incidents involving vehicles and mines would suggest that the vast majority of incidents occur when vehicles leave the road in order to avoid an obstacle. These include:

- Overtaking other vehicles
- Passing other vehicles coming towards you
- Going round large holes, boggy areas and obstacles in the main road
- Going past vehicles that have become stuck or broken down
- Toilet stops

The verges of many roads remain suspect even when the road itself is heavily trafficked and may indeed have been cleared or had threat-reduction procedures along it. Always treat verges as suspect, and only leave the main body of the road if a clear and well-used passing place is visible.

Leaving the roads becomes increasingly likely during the wet season, and particular attention should be paid to driver training and behaviour during this period.

Do not leave the area of the road where there are clear vehicle tracks for any reason

GUIDELINE 4: KNOW WHEN TO STOP AND TURN BACK

There are many areas where roads just peter out after several kilometres, and become overgrown, single tracked paths. Whilst it can be frustrating not to be able to complete the journey and achieve objectives, at any point where the tracks are no longer very clear and the road becomes increasingly overgrown, the vehicle should not travel any further.

Journeys can be continued on foot if your own security procedures allow, and providing people remain on clearly used paths. A basic rule when working in a potentially mine-contaminated environment is not to walk, travel or use in any way paths or roads that are not clear and in regular use. It is important to remain on clear, well-used paths and roads at all times.

Stay on routes with clear tyre tracks and that are obviously in regular use

GUIDELINE 5: VEHICLE MODIFICATION

Firstly, it is important to note that no form of armouring to a standard vehicle can render it "mine proof", although it can, depending on the specific circumstances of the detonation, reduce the likelihood of death or serious injury.

The HALO Trust, a British mine action agency operating in Angola, can provide information about armouring techniques they themselves use to provide additional protection to vehicles. Other suppliers provide specially adapted trucks and vehicles that are armoured to provide additional protection against anti-vehicle mines.

Toyota Landcruisers can be fitted with Ballistic Blankets, but it should be emphasised that these will provide extremely limited protection against an anti-vehicle mine blast.

Consider seeking further advice on using specially modified vehicles



GUIDELINE 6: PREPARE FOR AN ACCIDENT

Even if best practices are followed such as those outlined above, it is still possible to be involved in a mine incident in Angola. As such it is a necessary precaution to make reasonable preparations for an accident. This includes:

- Ensure some, if not all, staff have some basic first aid training
- Provide all vehicles with a fire extinguisher and first aid kit
- Have contact details of mine action agencies operating in the area in the vehicle and at the base, such as radio frequencies, satellite phone numbers etc.
- Make sure established communication checks and procedures are being followed

In the event of a mine incident, best procedure is to remain in the vehicle unless there is a fire. From the vehicle immediate attempts should be made to report the incident to your operations base. Once the report of a mine incident has been received, a mine action agency should be contacted immediately in order to provide expert support.

In the event that evacuation of the vehicle is required, exit the vehicle from the rear, and move away from the scene of the incident along the tyre tracks of the vehicle.

Have effective procedures in place to deal with a mine incident

CONCLUSION

It must be accepted that given the nature of the mine problem in Angola that there is an inherent risk involved in travelling on roads. The decision to use or not use a road must be taken with the full knowledge that it is not possible to declare any road completely risk-free in terms of the mine threat. However, if these guidelines are followed, the risk of being involved in a mine incident in Angola will be greatly reduced.

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