GICHD ISSUE BRIEF

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LAND RELEASE IN THE INTERNATIONAL MINE ACTION STANDARDS

What has changed and what it means for mine action

In 2026, significant changes were made to the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) in relation to the core topic of land release. In January 2026, the United Nations InterAgency Coordination Group on Mine Action endorsed a new edition of IMAS 07.11 on *Land Release* and withdrew IMAS 07.10 on *Land Release and Residual Contamination Management*. In September 2026, the IMAS Review Board approved Technical Note for Mine Action (TNMA) 07.11/04, *Guidance for the Implementation of Land Release*, providing practical inputs to support implementation of the revised standard.

The withdrawal of IMAS 07.10 consolidates the IMAS guidance on the topic of land release, bringing it all together in one place under IMAS 07.11, avoiding redundancy and duplication. Core concepts such as definitions, the application of all reasonable effort, and residual contamination management are incorporated into IMAS 07.11, while other procedural aspects previously contained in IMAS 07.10, such as accreditation, contracting, and quality and information management, are covered in dedicated IMAS standards. The aim was to simplify the language used, improve accessibility for national authorities, reduce duplication, facilitate translation, and strengthen and clarify the technical content.

The changes were more than semantic. They clarified long-standing issues relating to the interpretation and implementation of land release, established a framework better able to accommodate developments in survey technologies and methods, and placed greater emphasis on evidence and confidence as the basis for land release decisions.

Moving beyond the "technical" and "non-technical"

One of the most substantive changes in IMAS 07.11 concerns the definitions of nontechnical survey and technical survey. In previous editions of the standard, nontechnical survey involved the collection and analysis of information through nontechnical means, while technical survey relied on appropriate technical interventions, typically involving physical access to hazardous areas.

In the updated definitions, the terms "intrusive" and "non-intrusive" replace "technical" and "non-technical". While the concept of intrusive investigation did appear in earlier IMAS documents (such as IMAS 07.14 on Risk Management in Mine Action, TNMA 07.11/02 on Key Performance Indicators for Land Release and Stockpile Destruction, and IMAS 09.13 on Building Clearance), the revised IMAS 07.11 is the first to define the terms explicitly. It shifts the focus away from whether an activity or technology is labelled as "technical" or "nontechnical" and concentrates on the nature of the intervention and the information and evidence that it can provide. The growing use of technologies that can collect information without physical access to or the disturbance of a hazardous area has made the older distinction between "technical" and "non-technical" increasingly difficult to apply.

Another change relates to cancellation. Cancellation has traditionally been closely associated with non-technical survey, while reduction has been associated with technical survey, and the two have been treated as distinct, standalone, and usually separate activities. The revised framework revisits this siloed approach. Cancellation should be understood as an evidence-based decision, rather than the outcome of a standalone activity. An area, or part of an area, may therefore be cancelled when sufficient evidence supports the decision to do so, regardless of when in the land release process that evidence became available.

Revised IMAS 07.11 also introduces the principle of continuity, recognizing that land release is a non-linear process that evolves in response to the analysis of new evidence, operational developments, and environmental conditions. It is therefore a process that requires regular evaluation, feedback, and the repeated application of survey and clearance methods to maintain confidence in the released land.

This principle is further reflected in the notes accompanying the definitions of reduced and cancelled land in IMAS 07.11.

Reduction may occur at any stage of the land release process, when it is reasonably established that there is no evidence of explosive ordnance contamination through intrusive interventions; cancellation may occur at any stage of the land release process when it is reasonably established that there is no evidence of explosive ordnance contamination, on the basis of reliable information meeting the applicable cancellation criteria.

This non-linear approach allows operators to respond to evidence as it emerges and to adjust their activities promptly, without having to pause to obtain new task orders each time new evidence calls for a different intervention. If a technical survey team finds that an area does not in fact meet the criteria for being recorded as a hazardous area, the team should be able to cancel that portion of land, or to recommend its cancellation, without the need for a separate, formal, nontechnical survey or new tasking.

For national mine action authorities and operators, therefore, the changes to the IMAS may call for more than the updating of references to the relevant standards. They provide an opportunity to review how land release decisions are made, documented, and reflected in national standards, task orders, and operational procedures.

Creating space for new survey technologies

The distinction between intrusive and nonintrusive approaches also reflects developments in technology. A range of emerging technologies can provide information relevant to the objectives of technical survey, for example helping to confirm the presence of explosive ordnance or delineating on. Some of these technologies can do so without physical intrusion into suspected or confirmed hazardous areas. Remote sensing, including through the use of aerial imagery and sensor-equipped drones and other uncrewed vehicles, for example, is increasingly able to provide information on the presence, distribution, type, and other characteristics of explosive ordnance contamination, in order to support decisions on the creation, cancellation, or reduction of hazardous areas.

The role of the technology is determined by the information that it produces and the level of confidence that can be placed in that information. A given technology may be deployed in different roles to support both intrusive and non-intrusive procedures, on the basis of national requirements, the contamination circumstances, and how it performs in different scenarios.

New technologies cannot replace established survey methods until they have proven themselves to be reliable. There must, therefore, be appropriate testing, validation, accreditation, and qualitymanagement arrangements.

The land release framework is now better placed to accommodate the technological developments witnessed in the mine action sector. As the reliability of remote-sensing tools and methods improves, national authorities and operators will be able to assess their potential contribution to mine action on the basis of their actual performance and the quality of the information that they have produced. This will be increasingly possible as new technologies move from research and trials into operational use.

Clarifying established terminology

Revised IMAS 07.11 introduces, or refines, definitions of terms that have long been used across the sector without a common formal definition. This includes concepts such as “direct and indirect evidence” and “explosive ordnance disposal spot tasks”.

The definition of an “Explosive ordnance disposal spot task” in IMAS 07.11 addresses a particularly long-standing question. Explosive ordnance disposal spot tasks have sometimes been treated as a form of land release, for example through the recording or establishment of an associated hazardous area in square metres. In other contexts, they have been treated as a distinct operational response to one item or multiple items of explosive ordnance.

Clarification of the relationship between explosive ordnance disposal spot tasks and land release should enable greater consistency in how these activities are planned, recorded, and reported. It also reinforces a fundamental point: land release concerns decisions about the status of land, whereas the removal or destruction of explosive ordnance does not necessarily, by itself, constitute the release of an area of land. An explosive ordnance disposal spot task does not automatically result in the creation of a suspected or confirmed hazardous area.

The practical importance of these definitions should not be underestimated. Common terminology supports the generation of comparable data, clearer national standards, and a more consistent interpretation of operational outputs across organizations and programmes. Although the IMAS provide a definition of “direct and indirect evidence”, it is crucial that national mine action authorities define what constitutes direct and indirect evidence in relation to different explosive ordnance types and operational contexts.

From principles to implementation

If revised IMAS 07.11 establishes the framework, TNMA 07.11/04 provides guidance on how its principles can be applied in practice. It deals with a range of issues that frequently affect the quality of land release decisionmaking. These include the use of evidence in land release decisions, planning considerations, cancellation and reduction criteria, confidence in information, source reliability, and triangulation.

Information is data or an account that has been obtained from a source. Evidence, however, is information that has been verified, assessed, contextualized, documented, and determined to be relevant to a specific finding or land release decision. This distinction is important because the quality of land release decisions depends not only on the information available, but also on how that information is assessed and used as evidence.

Evidence is therefore a central theme running through TNMA 07.11/04. Land release decisions are rarely based on a single piece of information; they normally draw on multiple sources that vary in quality and reliability. Sources may include community members, historical records, previous survey and clearance activities, and accident data. Assessment of the reliability of these sources and triangulation of the information that they provide are essential for building a robust evidence base to justify land release decisions. The relevant issue therefore is not the existence of information, but the level of confidence that decision-makers can place in it.

This level of confidence is particularly important for the creation of suspected and confirmed hazardous areas, cancellation, and reduction, where authorities and operators need to be able to demonstrate why the available evidence was sufficient for them to change the status of an area.

The absence of evidence is simply that

Historically, areas have sometimes been recorded as suspected hazardous areas for reasons that have not been supported by evidence. Both revised IMAS 07.11 and TNMA 07.11/04 reinforce the need for evidencebased decision-making and clarify that an absence of information should not, in itself, be treated as evidence of suspected or confirmed contamination.

The land release principles described in IMAS 07.11 are clear on this point. Decisions concerning contamination must be evidence-based and should not rely solely on the absence of information. Fear alone is insufficient to justify the designation of a hazardous area, which must be supported by evidence. Similarly, inaccessible areas, or areas for which information is limited, should not, by default, be recorded as suspected or confirmed hazardous areas.

TNMA 07.11/04 builds on these principles by providing practical tools that can be adapted to the local context. It supports the development of context-specific criteria for establishing, cancelling, reducing, and clearing hazardous areas, proportionate to the contamination type, the type of land use, and the risk. It also sets out the tools that need to be developed and categorizes direct and indirect evidence.

What this means for mine action programmes

The 2026 changes to the IMAS land release framework represent the evolution of, rather than a departure from, established land release principles: the framework under which evidence can be obtained, assessed, and acted upon has evolved.

Revised IMAS 07.11 and TNMA 07.11/04 do not fundamentally change the objective of land release: land should be released when sufficient evidence demonstrates that it can be used safely for its intended purpose, and operational resources should be focused on areas where contamination is confirmed or reasonably suspected.

For national mine action authorities, the changes provide a reason to review national mine action standards and associated policies to ensure that definitions, cancellation and reduction criteria, survey requirements, tasking procedures, and information-management practices remain aligned with the IMAS.

For operators, the changes may require a review of standard operating procedures, particularly where procedures continue to associate cancellation exclusively with nontechnical survey or define technical survey primarily in terms of particular tools or sequence.

The changes also have implications for the introduction of new technologies. Demonstrating that a specific technology works is only part of the process. Programmes need to determine what information that technology provides, how reliable the information is under defined conditions, and how it can be assessed as evidence to support decisions about the status of the land.

Finally, greater emphasis on non-linearity of the land release process and evidencebased decisionmaking should prompt those involved in the setting of programmes to examine not only what decisions have been made, but why. The recording of the reasoning behind cancellation and reduction decisions strengthens quality management and provides an evidence base for learning and improvement. It also reinforces the overall application of all reasonable effort and helps address concerns over future liabilities.

The next step is implementation. National mine action authorities should further define the land categorization,

reduction, and cancellation criteria within their specific contexts. The value of the revised framework will ultimately depend on how effectively its principles are translated into national standards, operational procedures, accreditation, information management, and day-to-day land release decisions.

For reference, the next pages set out the new definitions and compare them with the previous edition of IMAS 07.11.

This issue brief was authored by Armen Harutyunyan and Radwa Rabie.

DEFINITIONS AND THEIR UPDATES

From IMAS 07.11, first edition, 10 June 2009, amendment 5, February 2019	From IMAS 07.11, second edition, 16 January 2026
non-technical survey The term "**Non-technical Survey**" refers to the collection and analysis of data, without the use of technical interventions, about the presence, type, distribution and surrounding environment of EO [explosive ordnance] contamination, in order to define better where EO contamination is present, and where it is not, and to support land release prioritisation and decision-making processes through the provision of evidence.	**non-technical survey** Collection and analysis of data, without intrusive interventions, about the presence, type, distribution and surrounding environment of EO contamination, in order to define better where EO contamination is present, and where it is not, and to support land release prioritization and decision-making processes through the provision of evidence.
technical survey The term "**Technical Survey**" refers to the collection and analysis of data, using appropriate technical interventions, about the presence, type, distribution and surrounding environment of EO contamination, in order to define better where EO contamination is present, and where it is not, and to support land release prioritisation and decision-making processes through the provision of evidence.	**technical survey** Collection and analysis of data, using appropriate intrusive interventions, about the presence, type, distribution and surrounding environment of EO contamination, in order to define better where EO contamination is present, and where it is not, and to support land release prioritisation and decision-making processes through the provision of evidence.
cancelled land (m2) A defined area concluded not to contain evidence of EO contamination following the nontechnical survey of a SHA/CHA.	**cancelled land** Suspected or confirmed hazardous area concluded not to contain evidence of EO contamination, based on reliable information that meets established cancellation criteria. Note 1 to entry: Cancellation may occur at any stage of the land release process, when it is reasonably established that there is no evidence of EO contamination. Note 2 to entry: Cancelled land is measured in square metres (m^2).
reduced land (m2) A defined area concluded not to contain evidence of EO contamination following the technical survey of a SHA/CHA.	**reduced land** Suspected or confirmed hazardous area concluded not to contain evidence of EO contamination, based on reliable information that meets established reduction criteria. Note 1 to entry: Reduction may occur at any stage during the land release process, when it is reasonably established that there is no evidence of EO contamination through the use of intrusive interventions. Note 2 to entry: Reduced land is measured in square metres (m^2).

residual risk

Residual risk is the risk remaining following the application of all reasonable effort to identify, define, and remove all presence and suspicion of EO through non-technical survey, technical survey and/or clearance.

residual risk

Risk that remains despite having applied all reasonable effort during the land release process.

residual contamination

Residual contamination refers to contamination which gives rise to residual risk.

residual contamination

Potential presence of EO that may not have been identified or addressed after applying all reasonable effort in accordance with the land release process.

NEW DEFINITIONS

direct evidence

Information that confirms the presence of EO with certainty and is verifiable.

indirect evidence

Information that suggests the possible presence of EO but does not confirm it with certainty.

explosive ordnance disposal spot task
EOD spot task

Disposal of single or multiple EO discovered outside a suspected or confirmed hazardous area (SHA/CHA).

intrusive intervention

Action involving the active investigation of the ground, structures, or objects in a suspected or confirmed hazardous area, undertaken to detect, confirm, or mark explosive ordnance hazards.

Note 1 to entry: Intrusive intervention involves the active investigation of the ground, structures, or objects in a suspected or confirmed hazardous area to detect, confirm, or mark EO hazards. It includes activities that disturb the ground or actively investigate the subsurface (such as ground-penetrating radar or other sensor technologies), followed by the analysis of the collected data to support evidence-based decision-making. The use of camera-equipped drones is not considered as intrusive intervention.

The GICHD works to reduce risks to communities stemming from explosive ordnance, with a focus on landmines, cluster munitions, explosive remnants of war, and unsafely and insecurely managed conventional ammunition. As an internationally recognized centre of expertise and knowledge, the GICHD helps national authorities, international and regional organizations, NGOs and operators in around 40 affected countries and territories to develop and professionalize mine action and ammunition management.

Through its work, the GICHD strives for the fulfilment of international obligations, for national targets to be reached, and communities' protection from and resilience to explosive harm to be enhanced. These efforts support sustainable livelihoods, gender equality and inclusion. They save lives, facilitate the safe return of displaced populations, and promote peace and sustainable development.

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