EXPLOSIVES FACTORIES

The UK has long produced explosive materials, historically relating to gunpowder and explosives for mining.

In World War One (WWI), the demand for munitions necessitated increased explosives production. His Majesty's Explosive Factories (HMEFs), National Explosives Factories (NEFs), and National Filling Factories (NFFs) were established across the UK for explosives production and munitions filling.

WWI factories were both purpose-built and converted civilian factories. Explosions in WWI factories were common and could result in explosives residue dispersal over wide areas. Explosives factories were also vulnerable to enemy bombing, which could lead to explosive residue dispersal if the factory was hit.

Typical explosives produced in WWI included picric acid, Trinitrotoluene (TNT), guncotton, and tetryl, although chemical agents such as phosgene and mustard gas were also produced.

NFF block plan, WWI

Aftermath of an explosion at a HMEF, WWI

Aerial photograph of an ROF, WWII

Evidence of explosive material buildup in pipework at a disused ROF

In World War Two (WWII), Royal Ordnance Factories (ROFs) were purposely constructed in remote areas to protect from enemy bombing and limit the impact of explosions. As in WWI, ROFs produced a wide range of explosives. Developmental explosives, such as Research Department Explosive (RDX), were also produced.

Chemical companies, such as Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI), also operated many of their own factories as 'agency factories' to produce explosive material for the war effort during WWII.

After WWII several ROFs remained active under private ownership, whilst other purpose-built factories were demolished and redeveloped. Most 'agency factories' returned to commercial production.

Hazard

Explosives factories provide a potential hazard from explosives contamination. Disposal of explosive material through burial or burning means that explosive contamination could be present in parts of these establishments.

The potential hazard remaining at former explosives factories depends on the type of historic production and the amount of remediation that has taken place. Ground investigations are advisable to determine whether any significant concentrations of explosives residue remain that may contaminate the ground.

An Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) hazard may exist at former explosives factories, due to storage or disposal of munitions that were filled at the factory, or from Unexploded Bombs (UXB) as a result of enemy bombing.

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