MUNITIONS DISPOSAL

During wartime, munitions disposal could take place almost anywhere and often went unrecorded. Locations away from populated areas, such as gravel pits, landfills, beaches, sand dunes, and marshes, were used to dispose of ordnance. Burial pits near defensive sites and airfields were also used to dispose of redundant or faulty munitions.

Explosives and munitions factories also had associated disposal areas for defective or unneeded munitions, typically in the form of a burning pit/ground in a remote area away from the main factory.

During World War Two (WWII), munitions disposal became a more formalised process, particularly as mass production of munitions led to more defective items.

Unexploded Bombs (UXBs) dropped by German aircraft also needed dealing with in a timely fashion. As a result, official bomb cemeteries were established in parkland and open spaces in towns and cities that were subjected to frequent bombing raids, such as London, Bristol, and Coventry.

Cratering at a cement works used for bomb disposal

Large-scale burning of munitions at an ordnance depot

Hazard

Munitions disposal provides several potential hazards. Disposal by burial means that live ordnance may remain buried in the ground with the same potential impact it would have during its initial use.

Where munitions were disposed of by burning or controlled explosion, there is potential for explosives residue and shrapnel. Waste tips containing explosives residue may also be present, particularly through accumulation if the disposal area has a long operational history.

Burning grounds that were routinely used for the destruction of explosives may have residual explosive contamination in soils around them. Additionally, a range of other contamination, including heavy metals and hydrocarbon fuels used or stored at the burning ground, may also be present in soils.

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