

## Primary certification of mine action processes in Ukraine

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One of the measures designed to deregulate the demining market in Ukraine is a pilot project for the certification of mine action operators and processes, which was introduced in Ukraine on 2 February 2024. Prior to the launch of this project, the certification rules in individual bodies differed in procedural details.

This project aims to unify precisely the procedural aspects. The requirements for applicants are still set by the legislation and national standards in effect at the time of application for certification.

#### 1. Mine action processes subject to certification in Ukraine

In order to become a mine action operator, it is necessary to pass the primary certification and obtain a certificate for at least one mine action process.

The following mine action processes are subject to certification:

- non-technical survey;
- technical survey;
- manual demining;
- demining with the use of machines and mechanisms;
- use of canine units of the mine detection service;
- clearing the area of military (combat) operations;
- demining of water areas;
- the procedure for neutralising (destroying) mines/explosive remnants of war;
- informing the public about the risks associated with mines and explosive remnants of war.

The following certification bodies currently certify mine action operators and processes in Ukraine:

- the Mine Action Centre of the State Special Transport Service (SSTS) in Chernihiv;

- the Interregional Centre for Humanitarian Demining of the State Emergency Service of Ukraine (SES) in Merefa;
- the Demining Centre of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in Kamianets-Podilskyi.

It is important to make sure that the certification body that the company is applying to is accredited for the relevant demining process. For example, the Mine Action Centre of the State Special Transport Service (SSTS) in Chernihiv certifies the process of water area demining.

## **2. General requirements for document submission**

All documents shall be submitted for certification in the national language. Documents drawn up in a foreign language must be translated.

The application and documents may be submitted in paper or electronic form with a qualified electronic signature.

Related article: Demining services in Ukraine

During the primary certification, it is not allowed to apply for certification of the same processes to different certification bodies simultaneously.

If the primary certification of one of the processes fails (documents are returned, deadlines are not met, etc.), the applicant may apply for certification of such a process to a different certification body or reapply to the same body.

In case a certificate of conformity has already been issued by the certification body to which the application for certification of the new process is submitted, the organisational stage is omitted from the primary certification of the new process, provided that the documents submitted earlier remained unchanged.

Certification is subject to a fee. Governmental operators and non-governmental/non-profit organisations may be exempted from the fee if the implementation of mine action measures is in line with their chartered objectives.

It is very important to audit the company's readiness for mine action certification, which will establish compliance with legislation and standards of documentation, organisational structure, personnel, material and technical base, etc.

This will help avoid both financial costs and a waste of time that will inevitably arise if deficiencies need to be corrected within a short timeframe during certification or if certification works are suspended.

## **3. Stages of primary certification**

### **3.1. Organisational stage**

During the organisational stage, a certification body confirms an applicant's organisational, financial, legal and managerial capabilities, as well as its quality management capabilities as a mine action operator.

For this purpose, a fairly broad list of documents and information must be submitted to the certification body, including, in particular:

- information on the qualifications, education and practical experience of the head of the company, heads of structural units and copies of their job descriptions;
- information on logistics capabilities;
- information on the internal quality management system, information management system, security and occupational safety measures, available certificates of conformity, etc.

The certification body must send an email to the applicant within 2 working days with a draft contract for the organisational stage of the certification and the cost of the works at this stage.

The application is reviewed within 5 working days. If the application is incomplete or contains inaccurate information, or is accompanied by an incomplete package of documents, it will be returned for revision. The period for revision cannot exceed 30 days.

If everything is in order with the application and the package of documents, the certification body shall process the application and documents within 10 working days.

If all non-conformities have been eliminated, the review may result in a decision on the applicant's passing the organisational stage.

### 3.2. Operational stage

The operational stage assesses the applicant's practical and technical capabilities to implement the processes based on the analysis of the submitted documents.

Documents should be submitted separately for each mine action process. These documents include, in particular:

- standards, norms, regulations and other documents covering standard operating procedures used for the process implementation;
- the structure of the units that carry out the process;
- information on the staffing, education and work experience of the personnel involved in the process;
- copies of training certificates for all personnel involved in the process;
- standards, training programmes for personnel involved in the process;
- information on safety, occupational safety and medical support of the process (if not already included in the standard operating procedures);
- procedures for process quality management and field document management;
- information on the equipment to be used, including its maintenance and supply of spare parts, relevant documents confirming its serviceability and suitability for the tasks;
- information on permits to perform high-risk work and/or to operate (use) high-risk machinery, mechanisms, equipment, etc.

The time frame and conditions for the start of a certification body's work at the operational stage, as well as the time frame for reviewing an application and its revision, are similar to those at the organisational stage. If the applicant fails to meet the deadlines, the documents are left without consideration and the certification work is terminated.

If an application and documents meet the requirements of the procedure, they are reviewed within 15 working days.

If non-conformities are identified during the review, the applicant must eliminate them within 30 working days. Failure to comply with this deadline will result in the termination of the certification.

If all non-conformities are resolved, a decision on passing the operational stage is made.

### **3.3. On-site assessment stage**

During the on-site assessment stage, a certification body shall confirm that the processes will be carried out and managed in accordance with the standard operating procedures and other documents used by the applicant to implement the process.

The on-site assessment stage is carried out for processes for which the certification body has decided that the applicant should proceed to the operational stage.

The on-site assessment stage includes:

- inspection of relevant premises, sites, equipment to determine their compliance with the requirements of standard operating procedures;
- demonstration of the implementation of processes;
- observation of the personnel's actions, including, inter alia, those of the units at the final stage of training (if possible);
- confirming that the number of staff and their qualifications to perform their duties are in line with the documents submitted by the applicant during the operational phase;
- confirming that the standard operating procedures and other documents used by the applicant for the implementation of the process and the relevant quality management processes are in line with the documentation previously submitted by the applicant and have been communicated to all applicant personnel as mandatory.

If at least one critical non-conformity is identified, the applicant must eliminate it within 20 working days. The documents on the elimination of critical non-conformities are reviewed by the certification body within 5 working days.

Critical non-conformities include:

- lack of communication facilities;
- lack of knowledge of the evacuation procedure by the personnel;
- violation of safe distances;
- protective clothing absent or worn incorrectly;
- violation of security measures.

If the applicant fails to eliminate critical non-conformities in a timely manner, the certification work will be suspended.

Note: the on-site assessment stage may be retaken only once. If critical non-conformities are found during the repeated on-site assessment, the certification work will be suspended, and the applicant will need to start all over again with a new application from the operational stage.

### **3.4. Data analysis and decision-making**

Data analysis and certification decision is made by a person or group of persons who were not involved in the assessment process.

Within 3 working days of the certification decision, the certification body concludes a certification agreement with the applicant for each process. After concluding such an agreement (also within 3 days), the certification body issues a certificate of conformity for each process.

From the moment the applicant receives at least one certificate of conformity for a process listed in the application, the applicant acquires the status of a mine action operator.

First-time certificates are issued for a period of 3 years. If changes need to be made to the issued certificates, only the same certification body that certified the relevant process may be contacted.