Britain’s Prince Harry is in the United States hoping to draw attention to the worldwide problem of unexploded landmines, which kill an estimated 15,000 people in 70 countries every year.

Soon after the prince touched down on American soil May 9 for his eight-day tour, he toured a landmine clearance exhibit on Capitol Hill with Republican Senator John McCain of Arizona, himself a Vietnam War veteran.

The U.N. estimates that since the 1960s, as many as 110 million mines may have been planted.
Prince Harry’s late mother, Princess Diana, worked with survivor networks to highlight landmine injuries to children and women. She drew world attention when she walked near an active minefield in the African nation of Angola to promote the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty.

The dangers of landmines

There are two main types of landmines; anti-tank mines meant to destroy or disable trucks and tanks, and antipersonnel landmines that are meant to maim individuals. Antipersonnel mines require only minimal pressure to explode and therefore pose the greatest threat to life.

Landmines were first widely used in World War II as a way to protect borders, camps and bridges from enemy soldiers. However, because antipersonnel landmines are cheap to make, they eventually became commonplace in civil wars where they were aimed at harming civilians.

In recent years, non-military groups have increasingly used landmines to terrorize communities and police their movements.

A U.N. report from 2008 wrote that landmines left over from previous conflicts still kill 15,000 to 20,000 people each year and maim countless others, mostly children, women and the elderly.

In 1997, 156 countries signed the Mine Ban Treaty, in which they agreed to stop production of antipersonnel landmines. However, according to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, out of the 12 states that did not sign the treaty (one of which was the U.S.), three countries, India, Pakistan and Myanmar, were still producing landmines as of 2009.

How do we get rid of them

As technology has progressed, landmines have become cheaper to produce and harder to detect. New mines can cost between $3 and $75, but can cost $300 to $1000 to remove. Some are small, plastic and colorful, making them harder to detect by metal detectors and more attractive to children.
Some demining operations use animals like dogs and rats to sniff out landmines, although research by the University of Montana shows that honey bees are the best living mine detectors. Other operations use mechanical methods like metal detectors or radar to locate mines.

After the mine is located, people will either manually disarm the device, burn it or detonate it.

Armored vehicles have been used to detect and destroy landmines at the same time by simply driving over minefields.

However, this kind of work is slow, and it can take years for an organization to come in and clear a field. One Afghan designer who grew up in a community dealing with the horrors of landmines recently gained attention for an award-winning wind-powered landmine remover that costs less than $60 and can explode several mines in one run. View a video profiling him and his device on the web at http://vimeo.com/51887079.

– Compiled by Allison McCartney for NewsHour Extra
READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What issue is a focus of Prince Harry’s 2013 U.S. tour?

2. About how many people do estimates say die from landmines every year?

3. About how many countries still have live, unexploded landmines?

4. What did Harry’s mother Princess Diana do to draw world attention to this issue in 1997?

5. What are the two main types of landmines?

6. When was the Mine Ban Treaty signed?

7. Did the U.S. sign the Mine Ban Treaty?

8. How much money can it take to remove a single mine?
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

1. Princess Diana’s call for a ban on antipersonnel mines was considered controversial by many politicians in Britain in 1997. Why do you think this is so?

2. Why do you think more attention is not paid to this issue?

3. Whose responsibility is it to clear minefields?

4. Why didn’t the U.S. sign the Mine Ban Treaty?

Extension Activity 1
Find a war veteran in your community and interview them about the issue of landmines and who should be responsible for clearing minefields.

Extension Activity 2
Have students write a 300-500 word essay on this topic providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra (extra@newshour.org). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.
Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

Unexploded Landmines Are Focus of Prince Harry’s Visit

May 13, 2013
http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/2013/05/unexploded-landmines-are-focus-of-prince-harrys-visit/

Estimated Time: One 45-minute class period with possible extension

PROCEDURE

1. WARM UP
Use initiating questions to introduce the topic and find out how much your students know.

2. MAIN ACTIVITY
Have students read NewsHour Extra's feature story and answer the reading comprehension and discussion questions on the student handout.

3. DISCUSSION
Use discussion questions to encourage students to think about how the issues outlined in the story affect their lives and express and debate different opinions.

INITIATING QUESTIONS

1. Why is Prince Harry visiting the U.S.?
2. What do you know about landmines?
3. What kinds of weapons are banned in warfare?

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What issue is a focus of Prince Harry’s 2013 U.S. tour?
   Landmine awareness

2. About how many people do estimates say die from landmines every year?
   15,000 (15,000 – 20,000)

3. About how many countries still have live, unexploded landmines?
   About 70

4. What did Harry’s mother Princess Diana do to draw world attention to this issue in 1997?
   She walked near an active minefield in the African nation of Angola

5. What are the two main types of landmines?
   Anti-tank mines and antipersonnel mines
6. When was the Mine Ban Treaty signed?
1997

7. Did the U.S. sign the Mine Ban Treaty?
No

8. How much money can it take to remove a single mine?
Between $300 and $1000

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)
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