

OREGON STATE POLICE EXPLOSIVES UNIT



SAFETY FIRST: EXPLOSIVES DISPOSAL OPERATIONS

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The Oregon State Police Explosives Unit is a small segment of the Criminal Investigations Division, currently consisting of 12 members. The Unit provides state-wide services to citizens and agencies in all matters concerning explosives. The majority of our services include the destruction of explosive materials such as dynamite and blasting caps, ammunition, and improvised explosive devices (I.E.D.s). Unit personnel also provide training to hundreds of law enforcement officers each year, conduct maintenance on expensive specialized equipment, and attend rigorous training courses themselves.

The Unit assists other public safety agencies and citizens by safely recovering quantities of ammunition, fireworks, and explosives which are encountered during the course of their duties. The quantities are impressive; in 2011 the unit recovered 1,959 blasting caps; 1,049 pounds of ammunition; 1,048 pounds of fireworks, 908 pounds of assorted both low and high explosive material, and 5,653 "special items" including military flares, cannonballs, seal bombs, and ammunition primers. So what becomes of all this "stuff"?

FIREWORKS

Illegal and surrendered fireworks are collected from many agencies around the state and stored until late fall when disposal operations are safe to begin. Since fireworks are by nature explosive items, and need to be treated as such during disposal operations, safety is paramount.

There have been different methods of mass disposals over the years, including burning items in an open pit or at the Solid-Waste-To-Energy plant in Brooks. However,

in 2007 a specially-designed furnace was constructed which allows the burning of 500-pound batches.

AMMUNITION

The Explosives Unit has a portable ammunition burner which allows for the melting and destruction of ammunition. The stout steel burner can accommodate recovered ammunition of .50 caliber or less, marine distress flares, shotgun shells and other similar energetic items. It is designed to survive an internal two-pound TNT detonation to provide operator safety. It also has a filtration system which meets Clean Air Act regulations. Fueled by liquid propane, this equipment can burn about 150 pounds of ammunition per batch. Burning the ammunition destroys the gunpowder and separates the lead from the brass, both of which are then sent to metal recyclers.

DYNAMITE

Commercial dynamites, which are mostly oxidizers and binders, are packaged in cylindrical wax paper wrappers called 'cartridges'. The most commonly encountered sizes in Oregon range from 1 1/4" x 8" to 2" x 16", although there are more than 20 standard sizes.

The safe disposal of commercial dynamite presents its own set of problems. Older dynamites which contain nitroglycerine will "weep" or "sweat" its nitroglycerine, which can then pool in the bottom of the box. Explosive crystals will form on the outside of the cartridges. THIS CREATES A VERY DANGEROUS SITUATION as nitroglycerine is very sensitive and unstable. Citizens are cautioned to not move or handle dynamite, but to call for assistance with disposal immediately.

EXPLOSIVES

Blasting caps and bulk explosive materials such as gunpowder, commercial explosives and military ordnance items are destroyed at O.D.O.T. gravel pits located around the state. The explosives are sorted by sensitivity and chemical properties, and placed in shallow holes for a controlled detonation. The countercharge used is always sufficient to completely destroy the unwanted materials.

IN CONCLUSION

Needless to say, the disposal of any and all of this type of material needs to be left to the professionals. The Oregon State Police Explosives Unit will respond anywhere in the state to safely address these issues. There are no criminal charges associated with the surrender of dangerous items, and there is no cost for our service. We exist to serve the citizens of Oregon; our goal is that no one is harmed by explosive items. Please contact the Unit at 503-934-0243, if you find or know of fireworks, ammunition, dynamite or any other type of explosive that needs to be destroyed in a safe and professional manner.