



**SAFELANE<sup>®</sup>**  
GLOBAL

# UXO:

**THE DEVESTATING,  
HIDDEN THREAT TO  
YOUR PROJECT.**

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**WHY WWII UNEXPLODED  
ORDNANCE (UXO) STILL  
AFFECTS CONSTRUCTION  
PROJECTS IN  
BIRMINGHAM TODAY.**

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# THE BLITZ

## Birmingham, the blitz, and the risks of encountering unexploded ordnance today.

At the start of WWII, the German air force, the Luftwaffe, planned to destroy key military installations in Britain during a series of daylight bombing raids, these included RAF airfields and Royal Navy bases. After the Battle of Britain, these tactics were modified to include the destruction of both economic and industrial sites too.

Luftwaffe targets included dock facilities, railway infrastructure, power stations, weapons manufacturing plants and gas works. As a result of aircraft losses however, daylight raids were reduced in favour of attacking targets under the cover of darkness.

As the war progressed, the Luftwaffe strategy changed again to one of attempting to destroy the morale of the civilian population by carpet bombing key locations.

As Birmingham had been synonymous with the manufacture of munitions and accessories since the mid-19th Century, dominating the country's output of non-ferrous metal and machine tools, it became an essential target for the German assault.

Birmingham was also one of Britain's major munitions manufacturing areas during both World Wars and so it was heavily targeted by the Luftwaffe, which inflicted considerable damage on all its major manufacturing areas. One official report stated that Birmingham possessed more 'key points' than any other city in Britain.

## Why was Birmingham so heavily bombed in WWII?

The first raid on Birmingham occurred on the 9th of August 1940. Within the following nine months, approximately 1,852 metric tonnes of high explosives were dropped on Birmingham, most of which were dropped during eight major raids.

On the 19th of November 1940, the first large-scale air raid was launched against Birmingham, when around 440 bombers attacked the city, killing 450 people and badly injuring 540. The raid turned out to be the most severe attack on Birmingham in the course of the war. During this and the following seven large-scale Blitz raids, well over 130,000 1kg incendiary bombs were dropped, causing hundreds of deadly fires.



Smaller raids continued in 1942 and 1943 - and by the final attack on the 23rd of April 1943, 12,391 houses, 302 factories and 239 other buildings had been destroyed, with many more seriously damaged, during 77 separate air raids.

Consequently, Birmingham was the third most heavily bombed city in Britain, behind London and Liverpool.

**WWII UXO still poses a risk to intrusive construction projects in Birmingham.**

One of the legacies of this conflict is buried, unexploded air-dropped bombs or anti-aircraft projectiles resulting from the failure of a proportion of the weapons to function as designed.

It is commonly accepted that the failure rate of these munitions was approximately 10% and, depending on their shape, weight, velocity and ground conditions, many penetrated the ground and came to rest at depth.

Whilst efforts were made during and after the war to locate and render safe all UXO, unsurprisingly, not all items were found and dealt with. This is evidenced by the regular, on-going discoveries of UXO during construction-related intrusive ground works across the length and breadth of Britain – not just in Birmingham.





# UXO FINDS IN BIRMINGHAM



## A sample of recent finds in and around Birmingham:

- WWII-era grenade found in a Birmingham canal in April 2021.
- WWII UXO found in canal in Acocks Green, Birmingham, in February 2021.
- Unexploded device found in Smethwick, December 2020.
- Several different items of WWII UXO were found beneath the floorboards of a house on Dora Road, Birmingham in July 2019.
- An unexploded bomb dating to WWII was discovered at Stechford Retail Park, Stechford in March 2019.
- WWII UXO found on a construction site close to Islington Row Middleway in May 2018.
- A 500lb WWII bomb was discovered on a construction site in Priory Road, Aston in May 2017
- An unexploded grenade was found amongst scrap metal at Trevor Street, Nechells, Birmingham in March 2017.
- An unexploded WWII Mortar shell was uncovered on a site in Aston, Birmingham in January 2013.



# UXO STILL AFFECTS PROJECTS

Are you a construction worker? Are you aware of the risk of UXO on your project?

Unexploded ordnance presents a significant risk to construction projects in parts of the UK because of enemy actions during the two 20th Century World Wars - and because of historic British and Allied military activity.

As a result of a generally increased risk awareness amongst professionals involved in ground engineering works and proactive health and safety measures, the risk to life and limb from UXO has been minimised. However, even the simple discovery of a suspected device during on-going works can cause considerable disruption to production and cause unwanted delays and expense.

Such risks can be more fully addressed by a better understanding of the site-specific risk and the implementation of appropriate risk mitigation measures.

The complexity of the risks requires end-to-end support, which can be offered by SafeLane Global. Request your free BombRisk report to understand your site's risk rating – and then allow us to advise you on the safest way to proceed. We will protect your people, your project and your reputation.



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