



UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

MARINE SAFETY ALERT

Inspections and Compliance Directorate

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Safety Alert 02-24

DANGEROUS BYCATCH FROM DISCARDED MUNITIONS REMAINS A PRESENT DAY HAZARD

This Safety Alert is being issued to raise awareness of lurking hazards caused by discarded munitions, which often contain active explosives or chemical agents. Although the practice of dumping munitions into the sea ceased in 1970, a significant amount remains hidden in coastal waters, posing a safety hazard to commercial fisherman, dredge operators, and others who trawl and work the ocean floor.

Recently, a deckhand on a clamming vessel was severely burned when a canister was dredged up and brought onboard with clams and other debris. The canister likely contained mustard gas or another blistering agent, but did not display any obvious visual, audible, or odor indicators of discharging content. A member of the crew discovered the canister and threw it back overboard. Several hours later he developed a severe rash that required professional medical treatment.

Mustard gas is a chemical weapon developed during World War I. Millions of pounds of this product, other chemical weapons, bombs, torpedoes, artillery shells, and munitions were routinely disposed of and remain in U.S. coastal waters. Although many munition dump areas are well marked on navigation charts, numerous areas where munitions were discarded remain unmarked. There is also evidence suggesting that munitions were frequently “short dumped,” meaning dumped outside of the designated areas by contractors hired to take them to the intended locations.



The Coast Guard previously issued [Safety Alert 11-16](#) and [Safety Alert 6-10](#) on this same topic and continues to **strongly recommend** that persons involved in the fishing and dredging industries:

- Review their navigational charts to ensure the areas in which they are trawling or dredging are not near labeled “Explosives Dumping Areas.” Such areas must be given wide berth and seafarers should recognize that surface bottoms change and that objects can move significant distances from their original disposal areas.

- Review and follow recommendations from the [Maritime Industry 3Rs Explosive Safety Guide](#).
- Carefully record the position of any munitions encountered and returned to the sea.
- Immediately report discovery to the National Response Center at 1-800-424-8802 to ensure a proper response and potential recovery. Alternatively, the local U.S. Coast Guard unit may be notified via very high frequency (VHF) channel 16.

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