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**Emerging Threats - Briefing**

JFEOD units act as safety blankets

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LASHKAR GAH, Afghanistan, Jan. 17 (UPI) -- The Joint Force Explosive Ordnance Disposal Group in Afghanistan is clearing routes of potential explosives before operations.

British commanders send out the JFEOD teams in an effort to clear the routes of potential landmines and improvised explosive devices before engaging in missions in Afghanistan's contentious Helmand province, the British Ministry of Defense reported.

"Everything that goes on in Helmand requires our support -- we're the first on the ground clearing the route," Warrant Officer Class 2 Darren Gathercall said in a statement.

Under Gathercall's command the JFEOD units use advanced equipment including cameras and metal detectors among other counter-IED devices to conduct route searches and isolate potentially dangerous devices.

"Out on the ground we're a real asset to those we're working with; an asset they can always use -- I believe we are almost like a safety blanket for the unit, they feel a real reassurance when we're around -- it's a sense of achievement for us when we clear an area and make it safe for the troops and in return they accommodate us really well," a JFEOD spokesman said.

Officials say Gathercall's units work to train British troops to be able to identify IEDs. The unit also carries out controlled explosions on the training compound at Camp Bastion Afghanistan in an initiative to better prepare troops and avoid the ongoing threat from IEDs.

"Wherever there are coalition forces there will always be a high risk of some sort of explosive device," Gathercall said. "The guys on the ground can't really move unless they have support from us and that's our main effort out here; to provide support to the whole of Task Force Helmand."

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