

Army looks for company to train bomb specialists

By MURRAY BREWSTER The Canadian Press
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OTTAWA — Call them super-CSI, but in a flak vest and helmet.

The Canadian army is dramatically upping the ante in training expert soldiers to fight networks that plant roadside bombs and booby traps in Afghanistan.

It has advertised for a company to train bomb-disposal technicians and intelligence analysts in the finer points of tracking down and dismembering the cells that plant improvised explosives, responsible for the vast majority of Canadian combat deaths and injuries in Kandahar.

"One of the deficiencies noted in (the current operation) is that of the Canadian Forces' (CF) limited ability to effectively and systematically exploit adversary documents and equipment," says a recent federal tender document.

The army has already invested heavily in methods to defeat the homemade bombs and in new equipment, including specialized road-clearing trucks and detection gear. But it has lagged in methodically hunting down the groups that bury the explosives in the ground.

"We're focusing more on attacking the networks," said Lt. Kevin McNamara, former clearance diver now in charge of what's called exploitation training with the military's counter-improvised explosive task force.

Over the years, the Kandahar battle group has conducted operations aimed at dismantling networks. But McNamara said they've been "reacting to the bomb" and there is now a greater emphasis on "intercepting the guy before the bomb is laid."

This year, homemade bombs accounted for 11 of the 13 Canadian deaths in Kandahar. The Defence Department says 92 of the 151 Canadian casualties since 2002 were the result of IEDs — improvised explosive devices.

"We're very good at defeat(ing) the device. The bomb technicians, the equipment, the personnel — some of the best in the world," he said.

"We're very good at preparing the force and getting soldiers ready to go into theatre. The attack the network side of it — we haven't been focusing on it that much."