



In-Station Training

TM 25-11 Commercial Fire



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Purpose

There are few absolutes in the fire service. One challenging topic of discussion involves search in vacant buildings on fire. Some have the view that this presents excessive risk to firefighters. Others point to the potential for homeless occupants in vacant buildings. There are examples of firefighters who died in the line of duty while searching or otherwise operating in vacant buildings and examples of homeless occupants rescued or found dead after fires in vacant buildings. Consider the critical factors. It depends!

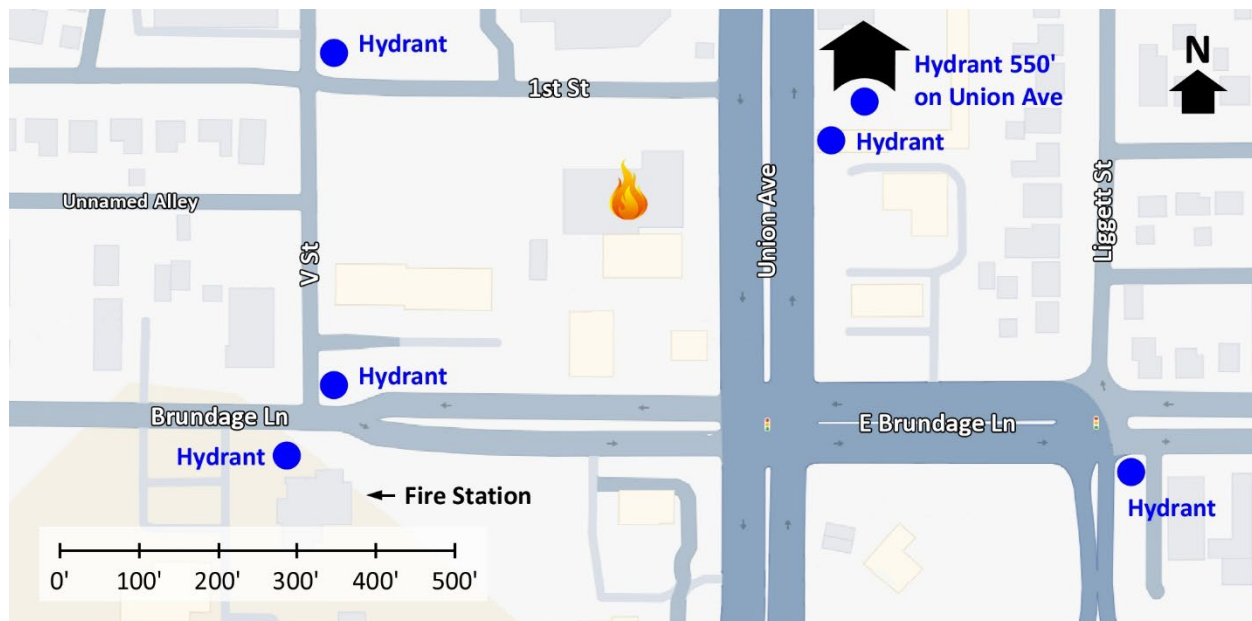
Learning Outcomes

Firefighters and officers perform an effective size-up, select an appropriate strategy, and implement tactics based on the strategic decision-making model.

Conducting the Drill

This incident involved a commercial fire at 25 Union Avenue in Bakersfield, California on Tuesday, December 31, 2024, at 05:52 (Barraza, 2024 & Garcia, 2024). Review the map and photos (Figures 1-7) to gain an understanding of the area and building involved.

Figure 1. Map of the Incident Area



Note: Adapted from Google. (2024a). [Map, 25 Union Ave, Bakersfield, CA]. <https://bit.ly/4gOupw6>.

Figure 2. Aerial View



Note: Adapted from Google. (2024b). [Aerial view 25 Union Ave, Bakersfield, CA].
<https://bit.ly/41WbNWQ>.

The closest hydrant on Union Ave, directly across the street from the Alpha/Delta Corner of the Main Fire Occupancy. There are additional hydrants in the area as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 3. Alpha/Bravo Corner



Note: Adapted from Google. (2024c). [Street view 25 Union Ave, Bakersfield, CA].
<https://bit.ly/3W5AhZR>.

Figure 4. Side Alpha



Note: Adapted from Google. (2024d). [Street view 25 Union Ave, Bakersfield, CA].
<https://bit.ly/3ZY40Fh>.

Figure 5. Alpha/Delta Corner



Note: Adapted from Google. (2024e). [Street view 25 Union Ave, Bakersfield, CA].
<https://bit.ly/4gTWHVW>.

Figure 6. Charlie/Delta Corner



Note: Adapted from Google. (2024f). [Street view 25 Union Ave, Bakersfield, CA]. <https://bit.ly/4iRNYiB>.

Figure 7. Bravo/Charlie Corner



Note: Adapted from Google. (2024g). [3d aerial view 25 Union Ave, Bakersfield, CA]. <https://bit.ly/3ZXh6CQ>.

The temperature is currently 49° F with no appreciable wind from the north (Weather Underground, 2024). **You are the company officer of an engine company.** It is Tuesday, December 31st, and you have been dispatched along with two other engines, a ladder company, medic unit, and command officer at 05:52 to CarQuest at 25 Union Ave for a commercial fire. The crew you relieved at the start of your shift

told you that they had responded to a rubbish fire inside the vacant CarQuest building the previous night. The engines and ladder have four-person staffing¹.



Time starts now! Answer the first eight questions within the next 10 minutes. Decide and put your answers in the form of communication you would have with your crew, other companies, and the first arriving command officer. Save discussion for after answering the first eight questions.

1. What critical factors would you consider when dispatched and during response? What conversations would you have with your crew during response?

You hear a command officer, two other engines, a ladder company, and an advanced life support ambulance go en route. Your fire station is located less than two blocks from the reported address, and you will arrive first, approaching from the south on Union Avenue. The second engine will arrive from the north two minutes after you arrive. The ladder company will arrive from the north four minutes after you. The command officer will arrive shortly after the ladder company. All other units dispatched on the first alarm will arrive after the command officer.

While responding, dispatch advises that the caller reports smoke and flames from the building. As you approach you see flames from the roof, but no smoke or flames from the attached Bravo 1 Exposure. Watch the [incident video](#) (Barraza, 2024) from 00:15 to 00:30 and examine Figure 8, illustrating conditions on arrival

¹ If your first alarm deployment is different, use your own resource assignment and staffing with the first and second arriving resources typical for your agency (e.g., two engines vs. engine and ladder).

Figure 8. Conditions on Arrival



Note: Adapted from Barraza, B. (2024). *Carquest auto parts* [video]. <https://bit.ly/4a4hyDY>.

2. State your initial radio report (IRR) exactly as you would transmit it to dispatch.

3. What specific actions would you take (as the company officer) immediately upon arrival and exiting the apparatus and what task orders would you give your crew?

You did not see any smoke or flames from the attached Bravo 1 Exposure as you approached the incident. As you arrive, you observe several homeless people gathering their belongings outside the building (Garcia, 2024). Watch the [incident video](#) (Barraza, 2024) from 00:00 to 00:13 and examine Figure 9. Access to Side Charlie of the Main Fire Occupancy is obstructed by a fence and terrain.

Figure 9. Conditions on Side Delta



Note: Adapted from Barraza, B. (2024). *Carquest auto parts* [video]. <https://bit.ly/4a4hyDY>.

4. Would you change the action you are taking or modify the assignments given to your crew? If so, what task orders would you provide?

5. State your update report exactly as you would transmit it to dispatch.

6. Engine 2 arrives and reports that they are Level 1 on a hydrant on Union Avenue. State the tactical assignment you would give them exactly as you would transmit it.

7. Ladder 1 advises that they are Level 1 on Union Avenue, state the tactical assignment you would give them exactly as you would transmit it.

8. Based on the anticipated effectiveness of your tactical operations, state your conditions, actions, and needs (CAN) report that you would provide to the first arriving command officer as part of command transfer to IC #2.



Reflect on your strategic decision-making and responses to questions one through eight before answering the next six questions. Give some thought to what cues, patterns, or anomalies (differences from conditions that you would anticipate) inform your answers.

9. What was the problem?
10. What was getting in the way of achieving your tactical priorities?
11. Was there anything in this incident that could have hurt or killed you (right now)?
12. Was it reasonable to believe that the Main Fire Occupancy was occupied?
13. Was there searchable space?
14. If you believed it was reasonable that the building was occupied and there was searchable space, what could you do about it?

This building had been vacant for some time. Watch the [incident video](#) (Barraza, 2024) from 00:38 to 04:50 before answering the next several questions.

15. In this incident the incident commander implemented a defensive strategy (in the main fire occupancy). Was this consistent with your incident action plan? What critical fireground factors influenced your choice of strategy.

16. Did the presence of homeless individuals outside the building influence your strategic or tactical decisions? If during your reconnaissance they told you that several of their friends had been in the building and may still be in there, how would this influence your strategy and tactics?
17. Did you remain offensive in Exposure Bravo 1? If not, why not? If so, what tactics did you use to protect this exposure?

Additional Learning: Vacant and abandoned buildings present a range of hazards during firefighting operations. Preplanning is often done for large, complex, and high-risk occupancies, but is also useful in managing the risk of response to fires in vacant or abandoned buildings. If possible, pre-planning for vacant building fires should be done on a jurisdiction wide agency level, but in some cases the magnitude of the problem may make this difficult. Pre-planning can also be done on an informal basis at the company level, increasing awareness of vacant and abandoned buildings within their first due response area.

Have a look at the resources in the International Association of Arson Investigators (IAAI) [Abandoned Buildings Toolbox](#) (n.d.).

Identify vacant buildings in your response area and discuss your agency's policies or common practices regarding operations in vacant buildings with the members of your crew.

References

Barraza, B. (2024). *Carquest auto parts* [video]. Retrieved January 19, 2025, from <https://bit.ly/4a4hyDY>.

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