In-Station Training

TM 25-39 Vacant Row House Fire

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Purpose

In response to structure fires, it is common for an engine company to arrive first. However, if companies are out of position due to simultaneous incidents, a ladder company, heavy rescue, or medic unit may arrive first. This can dramatically change initial tactical operations.

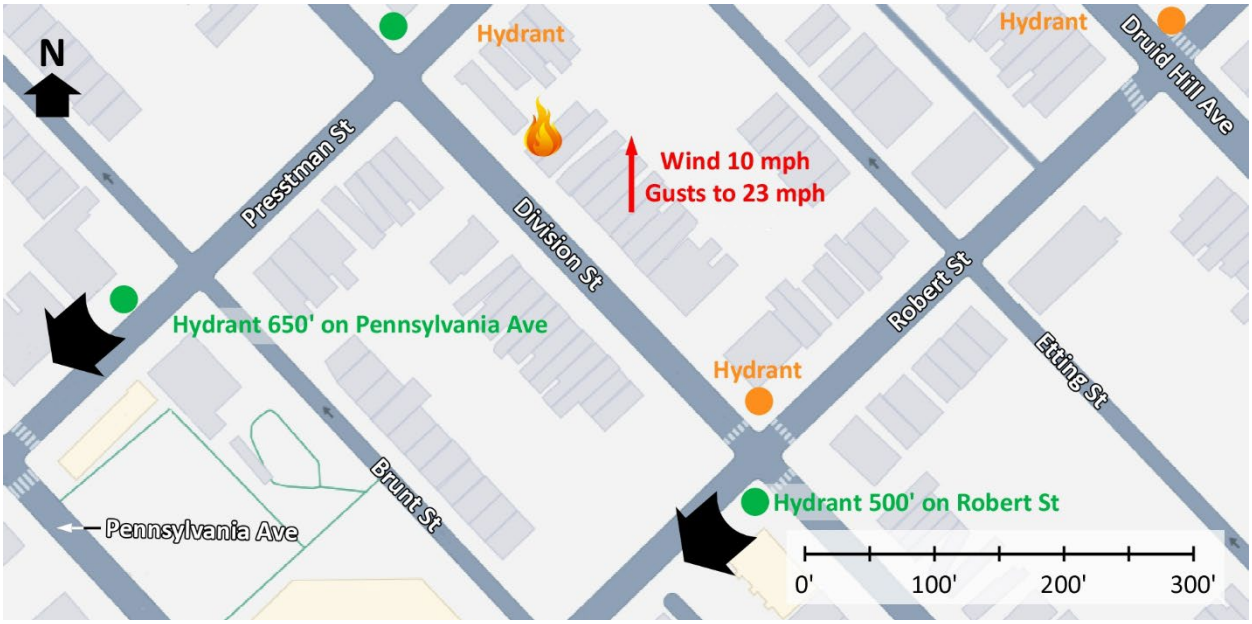
Learning Outcomes

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 vacant row house fire at 1927 Division Street, Baltimore, Maryland on September 4, 2025, at 15:23 (Tall28guy, 2025; Baltimore City Fire Department, 2025; & Broadcastify, 2025). Review the map and photos (Figures 1-7) to gain an understanding of the building and area involved.

Figure 1. Map of the Incident Area



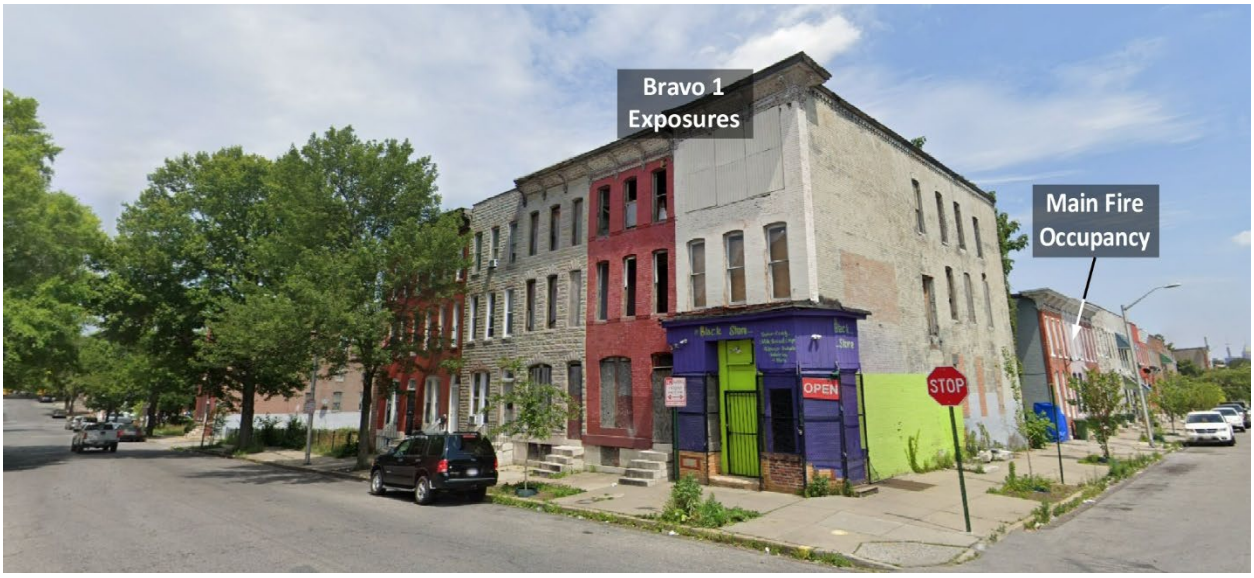
Note: Adapted from Google. (2025a). [Map, 1927 Division Street, Baltimore, MD]. https://bit.ly/4ny7ZCr.

The closest hydrants are on Division Street at the ends of the block (Presstman Street and Robert Street), and additional hydrants are in the area as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 2. Aerial View

Note: Adapted from Google. (2025b). [Aerial view 1927 Division Street, Baltimore, MD]. https://bit.ly/4nytcwe.

Figure 3. Bravo Exposures



Note: Adapted from Google. (2019a). [Street view 1927 Division Street, Baltimore, MD]. https://bit.ly/46nT2fl.

Figure 4. Alpha/Bravo Corner

Note: Adapted from Google. (2019b). [Street view 1927 Division Street, Baltimore, MD]. https://bit.ly/3VSxtia.

Figure 5. Side Alpha

Note: Adapted from Google. (2019c). [Street view 1927 Division Street, Baltimore, MD]. https://bit.ly/46pbhBd.

Figure 6. Alpha/Delta Corner

Note: Adapted from Google. (2019d). [Street view 1927 Division Street, Baltimore, MD]. https://bit.ly/3IbQ6ur.

Figure 7. Side Charlie from Etting Street

Note: Adapted from Google. (2012). [Street view 1927 Division Street, Baltimore, MD]. https://bit.ly/46dMOjv.

The temperature is currently 85° F with wind from the south at 10 mph with gusts to 23 mph (Weather Underground, 2025). **You are the company officer of a ladder company**. It is Thursday, September 4th, and you have been dispatched along with **five engines**, **another ladder company**, medic unit, and **two command officers**[1] to the 300 block of Presstman Street at 15:23 for a residential fire with two "Code X-Rays[2]". The engines and ladders have four-person staffing[3].

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 two command officers, five engines, another ladder company, and an advanced life support ambulance go en route. While responding, dispatch provides an update that 549, 547, and 545 Presstman Street are all "Code X-Rays".

You will approach from the northwest on Presstman Street and arrive first. The first engine company will arrive from the southeast on Division Street shortly after you are on-scene. The second engine will arrive from the northeast on Presstman Street three minutes after the ladder company. The command officer will arrive shortly after the second engine. All other units dispatched on the first alarm will arrive after the command officer.

You arrive and identify that the actual fire location is 1927 Division Street. Examine Figure 8, illustrating conditions on arrival and watch the incident video (Tall28guy, 2025) from 01:32 to 02:15. Note that the initial segment of incident video was shot from the Alpha/Delta perspective (opposite the direction of travel of the first arriving ladder company).

[1] Note that the deployment for fires in this area is five engines and two ladder companies due to the nature and condition of buildings and potential for a group fire (involving multiple buildings). Additional alarms will each add the same resource deployment (i.e., second alarm will double the number of resources).
[2] "Code X" refers to vacant buildings that have been deemed structurally unsafe to enter, even during fires. In Baltimore City, firefighters are prohibited from entering "Code X" buildings unless there is a credible report of someone trapped inside, which requires a thorough assessment and approval from the incident commander.
[3] 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 Tall28guy. (2025). *Pre arrival 1900 blk Division St Baltimore 9-4-2025* [video]. https://bit.ly/4mkUbdJ

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?

Conditions on Side Bravo are consistent with those observed from Side Alpha. On Side Charlie, smoke is showing from Floors 1 and 2 of the Main Fire Occupancy and from Floor 2 of the Delta 1 Exposure.

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 1 arrives and reports that they are Level 1 on a hydrant at Robert and Division Streets. State the tactical assignment you would give them exactly as you would transmit it.

7. Engine 2 arrives and reports that they are Level 1 on a hydrant at Presstman and Druid Hill Avenue. State the tactical assignment you would give them exactly as you would transmit it.

8. Based on 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?

The Baltimore City Fire Department (like many other mid-Atlantic region fire departments) uses an "order of arrival" system where positioning and general tactical responsibilities are based on the kind of resource (e.g., engine, truck, or rescue) and sequence in which they arrive (e.g., first arriving engine, second arriving engine, first arriving truck, etc.). This is different than the critical factors based, IC specified tactical assignment that is used in the Blue Card system.

Watch the incident video from 02:15 to 09:00.

The following narrative was developed based on the incident video (Tall28guy, 2025) and incident radio communications (Broadcastify, 2025).

> In this incident, Truck 16 arrived and gave an initial radio report updating the address to 1927 Division Street and advised that the Main Fire Occupancy was a "Code X-Ray". The two firefighters from Truck 16 deployed portable ladders to Floor 2 of the Main Fire Occupancy and the Delta 1 Exposure. Battalion 3 arrived immediately after Truck 16 and took command. IC #2 (Battalion 3) provided an update, affirming that the Main Fire Occupancy was a "Code X-Ray" and that the Delta 1 Exposure was vacant. IC #2 clearly specified "exterior operations only" and asked dispatch to restate the message. While not specified, the Delta 2 was occupied. IC #2 tasked Truck 16 with setting up their ladder pipe and Engine 23 (thought to be the first arriving engine) to supply Truck 16. Engine 14 arrived first and performed a forward lay from the hydrant at Robert and Division Streets with a single 4" supply line, positioning nose to nose with Truck 16. IC #2 advised Engine 23 that they would be second due and tasked them with laying into Side Charlie (normal assignment for second due engine). Engine 14 stretched an attack line on Side Alpha and provided a hoseline to supply Truck 16's ladder pipe. Engine 55 was assigned to pump Engine 14's supply line using

15. Given that the Main Fire Occupancy was "end of row" did you perform reconnaissance to identify conditions on Side Charlie? Why or why not?

16. How did the initial actions of Truck 16 (first arriving company) differ from your initial incident action plan? What may have influenced the initial actions of Truck 16?

17. Was your initial incident action plan similar or different than the plan implemented by Battalion 3? What factors influenced your decision making and initial incident action plan?

18. Does your aerial ladder (or those that you work with) have pre-piped waterways or do they use 3" hose to supply a ladder pipe that is demountable such as the one used by Truck 16? How long does

it take to deploy the ladder pipe for overhead water application? If you don't know, take the opportunity to find out!

There are many different tactics, systems of work, and command practices used in firefighting operations. While the Baltimore City Fire Department may operate in a manner different than your agency, they have a tremendous amount of experience dealing with occupied, vacant, and structurally unstable row houses. Unfortunately, many of the lessons learned by the BCFD were the result of tragic circumstances.

- On January 24, 2022 Lieutenant Paul Butrim, Acting Lieutenant Kelsey Sadler and Firefighter/Paramedic Kenneth Lacayo died in the line of duty in a vacant row house fire with a report of trapped occupants.
- On October 19, 2023 Firefighter Rodney Pitts III and Lieutenant Dillon Rinaldo died in the line of duty in a fire that occurred in an occupied row house.

Operations at this incident reflected many of these lessons learned.

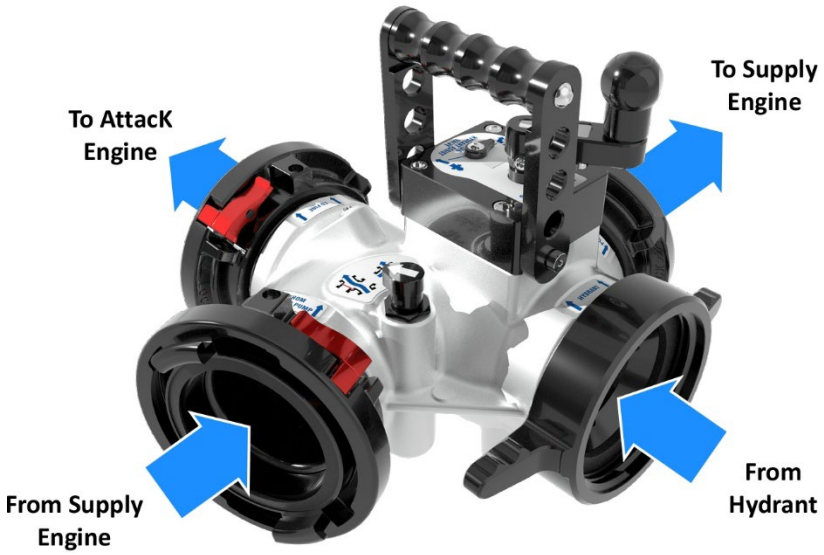
Additional Learning: Multiple opportunities for additional learning in this 10-Minute Training! Row house tactics, elevated master stream operations, and water supply.

Read and discuss National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) *Row House Firefighting Tactics* (NIOSH, 2022) with the members of your crew. If you don't have row houses in your response area, consider other similar occupancy types such as townhouses. Identify the similarities and differences and where these tactical considerations apply.

Watch *TDA Water Tower* (SDFD Driver Operator, 2022) and *Aerial Master Stream Ladder Pipe* (Livermore Pleasanton Fire Department, 2023) to learn a bit about deployment and supply of demountable ladder pipes supplied with a hoseline. Note that movement of the aerial ladder with a firefighter on the tip (particularly extending or retracting the fly sections) presents increased risk (and some agencies prohibit this practice). Get out and practice these skills (or if you are on an engine company, work with a truck on supplying a ladder pipe or tower ladder).

Companies operating at this incident encountered multiple water supply challenges including low pressure and flow as well as inoperative hydrants. The Baltimore City Fire Department uses 4" supply lines with *Task Force Tips Oasis™ Hydrant Assist Valves* (TFT, 2024a) as illustrated in Figure 9 and watch *Oasis™ Hydrant Assist Valve: Maximize Water Supply, Pressure, and Flow Rate* (TFT, 2024b). This type of hydrant valve allows a company to perform a forward lay and another engine to take over and pump their supply line without having to shut the hydrant down.

Figure 9. Task Force Tips Oasis Hydrant Valve



Note: Adapted from Task Force Tipes (2024a) Oasis™ hydrant assist valves. Retrieved September 20, 2025, from https://bit.ly/4ne6DgJ.

Review the procedure that your agency uses to take over a hydrant and pump a supply line (or lines) to an attack engine along with how to use priority traffic radio communications to report a dead hydrant. Get out and practice these skills!

References

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