



# In-Station Training

## TM 25-40a Vacant Row House Fire



### Author

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### Purpose

This 10-Minute Training revisits the vacant row house fire used in TM 25-39 from the perspective of IC #2. Safe and effective incident operations to prevent extension to occupied exposures and achieve fire control require effective risk management, clear communications, and solid tactical supervision.

### 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, 2023). 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>.

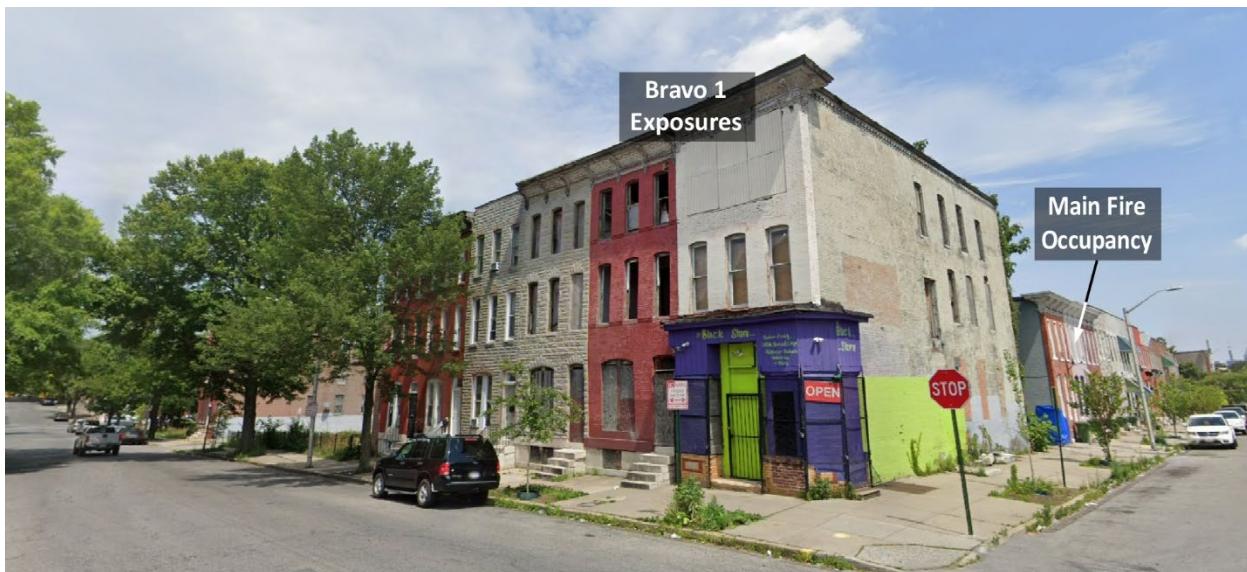
The closest hydrants are on Division Street at the ends of the block (Presstman Street and Robert Street), and additional hydrants are in the area as illustrated in Figure 1.

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>.

**Important:** The sequence of arrival in this 10-Minute Training is different than that used in TM 25-39. In the previous training, Ladder 1 was first arriving, followed by Engines 1, 2 and the command officer. This sequence was used to maximize the decision-making value of the training for IC #1. In this 10-Minute Training, the arrival sequence follows the order of arrival that occurred during the actual incident with the command officer arriving immediately after Ladder 1.

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 first arriving command officer.** It is Thursday, September 4<sup>th</sup>, and you have been dispatched along with **five engines, two ladder companies, medic unit, and another command officer**<sup>1</sup> to the 300 block of Presstman Street at 15:23 for a residential fire with two "Code X-Rays"<sup>2</sup>. The engines and ladders have four-person staffing<sup>3</sup>.



Time starts now! Answer the first 11 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 11 questions.

1. What critical factors would you consider when dispatched and during response? If you are fortunate enough to have a support officer (aide), what conversations would you have with them while enroute to the incident?

You hear another command officer, five engine companies, two ladder companies, 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 are right behind Ladder 1 and will approach from the northwest on Presstman Street and will arrive immediately after the ladder. 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 later. The remaining companies and second command officer within 10 minutes of the first arriving company.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 (multiple buildings). Additional alarms will each add the same resource deployment (i.e., second alarm will double the number of resources).

<sup>2</sup> "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.

<sup>3</sup> 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).

Ladder 1 arrives and provides the following initial radio report.

*On-scene with a corrected address, 1927 Division Street, small, two story row house, end of row, with defensive fire conditions, defensive strategy, Ladder 1 is Division Command.*

You arrive right behind Ladder 1. 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).

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. What actions will you take prior to contacting IC #1 (Ladder 1) to begin command transfer?

3. State your command transfer communication after IC #1 acknowledges your radio contact (exactly as you would transmit it).

Following your confirmation of the location and assignment of Ladder 1 and request for conditions, actions, and needs (CAN) report, IC #1 provides the following CAN:

*The main fire occupancy is Code X-Ray, Bravo 1 and Delta 1 are vacant, Delta 2 is occupied, lookout basements in the main fire occupancy and exposures. Occupants report that everyone is out of Delta 2.*

4. What action would you take based on the CAN from Ladder 1 (IC #1)? State the communications you would have with Ladder 1 exactly as you would transmit them.
5. 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.
6. Engine 2 arrives and reports that they are Level 1 on a hydrant at Presstman Street and Druid Hill Avenue. State the tactical assignment you would give them exactly as you would transmit it.
7. Engine 3 arrives and reports that they are Level 1 on the hydrant at Robert and Division Streets. State the tactical assignment you would give them exactly as you would transmit it.
8. Chief 2 arrives and reports that they are Level 1 on Druid Hill Avenue at Robert Street. State the tactical assignment you would give them exactly as you would transmit it.

9. Ladder 2 arrives and reports that they are Level 1 at Presstman and Etting Streets. State the tactical assignment you would give them exactly as you would transmit it.
  
10. Engine 4 arrives and reports that they are Level 1 on a hydrant at Presstman Street and Druid Hill Avenue.
  
11. Engine 5 arrives and reports that they are Level 1 on a hydrant at Pennsylvania Avenue and Robert Street. State the tactical assignment you would give them exactly as you would transmit it.



Reflect on your strategic decision-making and responses to questions one through 11 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.

12. What was the problem?
  
13. What was getting in the way of achieving your tactical priorities?
  
14. Was there anything in this incident that could have hurt or killed you (right now)?
  
15. Was it reasonable to believe that the Main Fire Occupancy or the exposures were occupied?
  
  
16. Was there searchable space?
  
  
17. If you believed it was reasonable that the main fire occupancy and/or the exposures were occupied and there was searchable space, what could you do about it?

Watch the [incident video](#) from 02:15 to 09:00.

18. Given that the Main Fire Occupancy was “end of row” did you obtain reconnaissance information to determine conditions on Side Charlie? Why or why not?

Based on your knowledge of the city water system, you are aware of poor water supply in the area except for hydrants on Presstman Street and Pennsylvania Avenue which are on 10” water mains. Other hydrants in the area are supplied by old, small diameter water mains and have limited flow. Hydrants in this area are also old and are occasionally out of service due to mechanical failure.

The following question is based on use of the hydrant at the intersection of Robert and Division Streets with the engine on the hydrant supplying an attack engine on Division Street (relay). The engine on the hydrant calls Division Command with priority traffic reporting low flow and residual pressure and that they are unable to supply the water required by the attack engine. Another company reported that they had a dead hydrant and were laying to another hydrant to establish water supply.

19. How will you address these water supply issues?

The Baltimore City Fire Department (BCFD) (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.

In addition, the BCFD uses a slightly different system for designation of exposures than is used in Blue Card and in this 10-Minute Training. The BCFD identifies the first exposure on a given side using the phonetic alphabet designation (e.g., Bravo Exposure, Delta Exposure) and the second and subsequent exposures using an alphanumeric designation (e.g., Delta 1 Exposure, Delta 2 Exposure).

There are many different tactics, systems of work, and command practices used in firefighting operations. While the BCFD 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 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.
- 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.

Operations at this incident reflected many of these lessons learned.

**Additional Learning:** Listen to the [incident Audio](#) (Command Competence, 2025). This audio has been edited to truncate “dead air” to shorten the length of the recording.

Identify what things were done well (there were quite a few).

There were multiple critical communications during this incident that had a positive impact on both operations and the safety of personnel working at this incident. How could communications have been improved?

Companies and IC #2 worked to resolve multiple water supply issues (low pressure and flow along with a dead hydrant, etc.) with a second alarm battalion chief assigned as the Water Supply Group Supervisor.

- Was it clear who was working for the Water Supply Group Supervisor?
- How can this functional assignment be used effectively to manage fireground water supply operations in an urban environment?

What lessons did you learn from this incident audio and how will this inform your work as IC #2?

To extend the additional learning in this 10-Minute Training, consider listening to the incident audio from prior row house fires in Baltimore that resulted in multiple line-of-duty deaths.

- [Stricker Street Incident](#), January 24, 2022 (Scanner Audio, 2023).
- [Linden Street Incident](#), Oct 19, 2023 (911 Radio Traffic-Major Incidents, 2023).

Think about the differences between the Division Street incident examined in this 10-Minute Training and these LODD incidents.

## References

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