



In-Station Training

TM 25-52a Residential Fire



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Purpose

The era in which a building was constructed, construction type, and design can all be critical building factors considered in size-up and during firefighting operations.

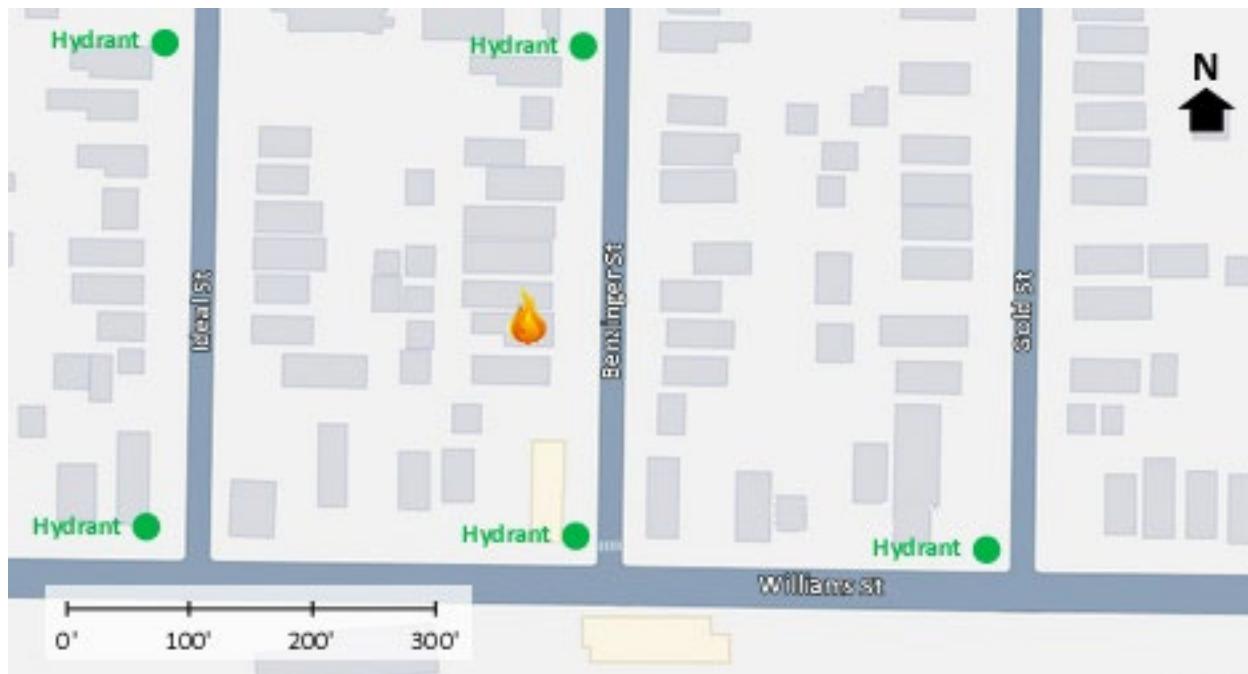
Learning Outcomes

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

Conducting the Drill

This incident involved a residential fire at 18 Benzinger Street, Buffalo, New York on Thursday November 20, 2025, at 07:18 (FBNY, 2025; Joly, 2025; & Broadcastify, 2025a, 2025b). Review the map and photos (Figures 1-5) to gain an understanding of the building and area involved.

Figure 1. Map of the Incident Area



Note: Adapted from Google. (2025a). [Map, 18 Benzinger Street, Buffalo, NY]. Map data ©2025 Google. <https://bit.ly/4rElC6i>.

There are two nearby fire hydrants, one at the intersection of South Benzinger and Williams Streets and the second in front of 40 Benzinger Street. Additional hydrants are in the area as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 2. Aerial View



Note: Adapted from Google. (2025b). [Aerial view 18 Benzinger Street, Buffalo, NY]. Imagery © Google, Imagery © Airbus Maxar Technologies, Map Data © 2025. <https://bit.ly/44MOhvV>.

Figure 3. Side Alpha



Note: Adapted from Google. (2025c). [Street view 18 Benzinger Street, Buffalo, NY]. ©2025 Google. <https://bit.ly/4pQJyl1>.

Figure 4. Alpha/Bravo Corner



Note: Adapted from Google. (2025d). [Street view 18 Benzinger Street, Buffalo, NY]. ©2025 Google <https://bit.ly/4psjfBS>.

Figure 5. Bravo/Charlie Corner 3D Aerial View



Note: Adapted from Google. (2025e). [3d aerial view 18 Benzinger Street, Buffalo, NY]. Map data ©2025 Google <https://bit.ly/4rl6q7V>.

The temperature is currently 28° F with no appreciable wind from the north (Weather Underground, 2025). It is Thursday, November 20th and you are dispatched to a residential fire at 18 Benzinger Street along with three engine companies, a ladder company, and a medic unit. **You are the command officer** and hear all first alarm companies go enroute. You anticipate that you will arrive shortly after the first engine and the ladder company. The engine and ladder companies have four-person staffing¹

The incident location is in the Lovejoy neighborhood, a predominantly working-class community with a stable, modest economic profile. The housing stock in this area consists primarily of owner occupied, older single family homes constructed prior to 1940. (Google, 2025f). Structure fire frequency in this area is typical of the average residential neighborhoods in the city.

While you are enroute, dispatch provides an update that the caller reported flames coming out the windows on the second floor and that there are hydrants at Williams and Benzinger and at 40 Benzinger.



Time starts now! Answer the first seven questions within the next 10 minutes. Decide and put your answers in the form of communication you would have with the responding companies, the second command officer, and dispatch. Save discussion for after answering these questions.

1. What critical factors would you consider when dispatched and during response?

Engine 1 arrives and provides the following initial radio report.

On-scene, small one and a half story house, working fire Floor 1, Side Delta, stretching an attack line through Side Alpha for fire control and primary search, offensive strategy, continue the alarm, Engine 1 is Benzinger Command.

Benzinger Command provides the following follow-up report:

360 complete, no basement, one-story on Side Charlie, repositioning the attack line through Side Bravo for fire control and primary search.

Ladder 1 arrives and reports that they are Level 1 on Williams and Benzinger Streets. Benzinger Command provides the following tactical assignment:

Position on Side Alpha, primary search, Floor 2.

¹ If your first alarm deployment is different, use your own resource assignment and staffing.

You approach this incident from the south on Benzinger. Watch the first 01:00 of the [incident video](#) (FBNY, 2025) and examine Figure 6 illustrating conditions on arrival. Click the link or scan the QR code to access the video.

Figure 6. Conditions on Arrival



Note: Adapted from Fire Buff New York-FBNY. (2025). 11/20/25-Buffalo FD working fire at 18 Benzinger Street [video]. Retrieved, December 6, 2025, from <https://bit.ly/4pVToID>.

Engine 2 goes Level 1 on a hydrant at Williams and Benzinger prior to your transfer of command and Benzinger Command provides the following tactical order.

Forward lay to Engine 1, stretch a second attack line off Engine 1 to protect the Delta 1.

2. What actions will you take prior to contacting IC #1 (Engine 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 Engine 1, Ladder 1, and Engine 2 and request for a conditions, actions, and needs (CAN) report, IC #1 provides the following CAN:

Water on the fire. Air status is over 75%, need a company for primary search on Floor 1.

4. State the communication you would have with IC #1 and dispatch to complete the command transfer exactly as you would transmit it.

5. What action would you take based on the CAN from Engine 1 (IC #1) and your observation of exterior conditions? State the communications you would have with the operating companies exactly as you would transmit them.

6. Engine 3 arrives and reports that they are Level 1 on a hydrant on Benzinger, north of the incident. State the tactical assignment you would give them exactly as you would transmit it.

Watch the remainder of the [incident video](#) (Hartin, 2025) and examine Figure 7 illustrating changing conditions. Click the link or scan the QR code to access the video.

Figure 7. Changing Conditions



Note: Adapted from Fire Buff New York-FBNY. (2025). 11/20/25-Buffalo FD working fire at 18 Benzinger Street [video]. Retrieved, December 6, 2025, from <https://bit.ly/4pVT0ID>.

7. Ladder 1 transmits a priority traffic radio message that they have been unable to locate the stairs to Floor 1 and need a company to access Floor 2 from the exterior. State the communications you would have with dispatch and/or operating companies based on this priority traffic message exactly as you would transmit them.



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

8. What was the problem?
9. What was getting in the way of achieving your tactical priorities?
10. Was there anything in this incident that could have hurt or killed you (right now)?

11. Was it reasonable to believe that the house was occupied?
12. Was there searchable space?
13. If you believed it was reasonable that the house was occupied and there was searchable space, what could you do about it?

The following questions are based on actual operations at this incident. The first alarm assignment for this incident was three engines, three ladder companies, and two battalion chief. When dispatched, the third ladder company was designated as the firefighter assist and search team (FAST). FAST is the same concept as a rapid intervention team (RIT) used in other parts of the country.

A numeric geographic designation system is used by the Buffalo Fire Department with the “front” or street side of the building being designated as Side 1 and the other sides of the building numbered in a clockwise direction (2, 3, and 4). This is like the use of phonetic alphabet designations used in other parts of the country (Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, and Delta).

Engine 28, the first arriving engine company, stretched an attack line through Side Bravo for fire control. Ladder 15, the first arriving ladder company, may have received face to face orders to perform primary search or may have implemented this tactical assignment by procedure.

14. Ladder 15’s initial action was to perform primary search of Floor 1. What factors might influence the decision to conduct search on Floor 1 prior to Floor 2?
15. IC #2, Battalion 46 (White Helmet and full turnouts in the incident video) made repeated requests for Ladder 15 to report on the conditions encountered on Floor 2. What building factors and observed conditions likely prompted IC #2’s concern regarding conditions on Floor 2?
16. After approximately 15 minutes of incident operations, Ladder 15 reported that they were unable to locate the stairs to Floor 1. As IC #2, would you expect that a significant delay in locating the stairs to Floor 2 would prompt a priority traffic radio message (as in this 10-Minute Training)? What factors could impact on the ladder company’s ability to locate the stairs?

Shortly after Battalion 46 (IC #2) increased the resource determination by adding two additional engines and an additional ladder company, Division Chief 56 arrived, provided a follow up report to dispatch and began functioning as the IC without a formal command transfer². Battalion 46 (who had been serving as IC #2) appeared to have been reassigned (face to face) to supervise companies operating on the interior of the building. Companies operating on the interior were not advised of this change.

17. What are the potential issues that may result from transferring command multiple times and/or command transfer without following a structured process?

18. If you were Battalion 46 and were assigned to manage the companies operating inside the building, what would be the most effective position for you to operate in? How would you ensure that the companies that you are supervising recognize the change in organizational structure? How would you maintain an accurate situational awareness?

19. Rescue 1 operating on Floor 2 advised the IC (Division Chief 56) that they had “high heat and heavy smoke” and that they “could use a line up there” [on Floor 2] along with “a roof” [vertical ventilation]. How did, or would you address the need for ventilation and what coordination would be required between companies performing fire control and the company or companies performing ventilation?

Additional Learning: Based on US Census Bureau data and regional housing characteristics it is estimated that over 90% of houses in Buffalo, New York have basements. The primary drivers of this fact are the age of the housing stock (63% to 67%) of Buffalo housing units were built before 1940 and homes in the Northeast and Midwest prior to 1940 commonly had full basements due to cold temperature (frost line) and heating system characteristics (Google, 2025g).

Think about your assumptions regarding the presence or absence of a basement. When Engine 1 (in this 10-Minute Training) reported “no basement” did you have full confidence in that report? Why or why not? If you still had concern about the presence or absence of a basement, how did, or would you resolve that issue? The house involved in this incident was constructed in 1910 and had a pier foundation under part of the house and a concrete slab under another part of the house (likely to be under a later addition).

² Within the context of Blue Card, command is only transferred once (from IC #1 to IC #2). The Buffalo Fire Department does not use Blue Card and in this incident transferred command from the Battalion 46, the first arriving chief officer (e.g., IC #2) to Division Chief 56, the more senior/higher ranking chief officer after his arrival on-scene.

Give some thought to the following building construction considerations:

1. Watch [1910's Remodel Pre-Engineering Investigation Work](#) (Risinger, 2010) for a look at construction characteristics including a pier foundation in a similar vintage home.
2. Look at [exterior and interior photos of 18 Benzinger Street](#) (Zillow, 2023) and consider how building construction and design may have impacted firefighting operations.
3. Read [Foundation Types in 2024: Slabs Continue to Rise, Crawl Spaces Decline](#) (Koh, 2025).and discuss the prevalence of foundation types and basements in your response area and the potential impacts on firefighting operations and firefighter safety with the crews that you work with.

Listening to incident radio communications can provide an important learning opportunity. But, as with watching incident videos it is important to recognize differences in operational context and remain focused on what can be learned.

Listen to the [radio communications](#) (Hartin, 2025) from the residential fire at 18 Benzinger Street. This audio recording has been edited to remove segments that have no radio communications or where radio communications involved other incidents. As such, this audio is not in real time. While listening to the incident audio:



1. Identify things that went well during this incident.
2. Use your own tactical worksheet to track the position and function of the companies operating at this incident (note that this will be difficult as some assignments were made face-to-face).
3. Identify issues that may have negatively impacted accountability and how these issues could be mitigated.
4. Identify issues related to air management and one or two ways that effective air management can be accomplished when working in a small house like the one in this incident.

Reflect on how you can use the lessons learned from this incident to inform and improve your practice as an incident commander and your agency's structural firefighting operations.

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