



In-Station Training

TM 26-15 Unknown Toxic Exposure



Author

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Purpose

An emergency medical response with multiple patients in an apartment building experiencing respiratory distress presents challenges from both medical and hazardous materials perspectives.

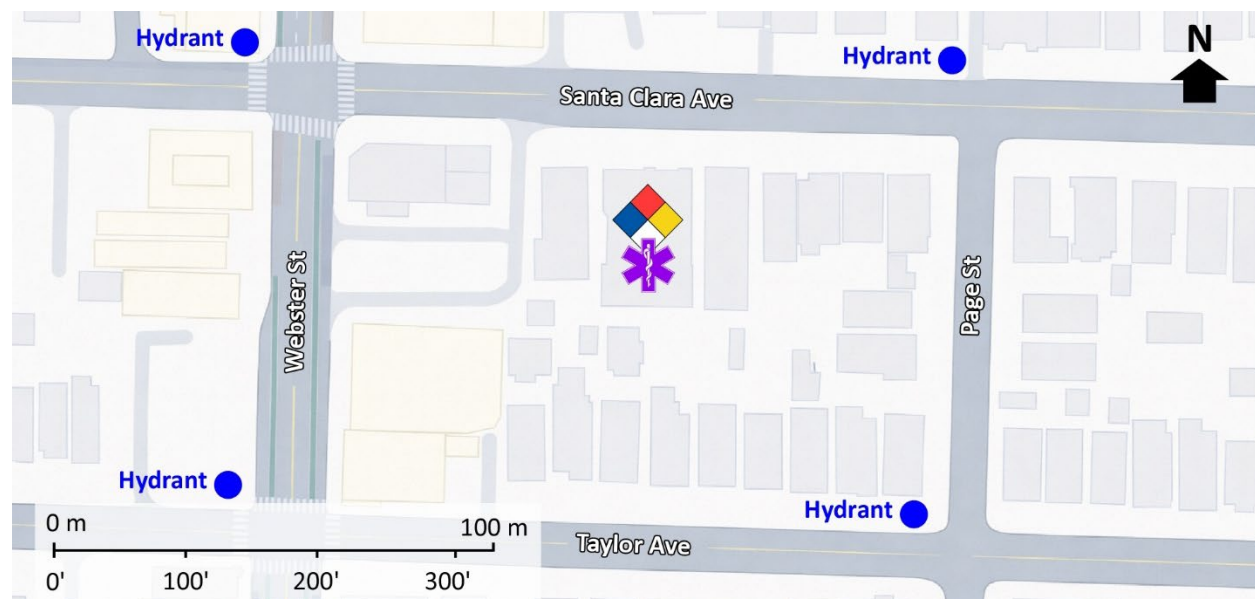
Learning Outcomes

Initial incident commanders 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 an unknown toxic exposure at Casa Blanca Apartments, 716 Santa Clara Avenue, Apartment 101. Alameda, California on Monday, March 16, 2026, at 14:02 (Baker, Larson, & Stinson, 2026; Harris, 2026; KRON 4, 2026; KTVU FOX 2 San Francisco, 2026; Alameda Fire Department, 2026; & Broadcastify, 2026). Review the map and photos (Figures 1-6) to gain an understanding of the building and area involved.

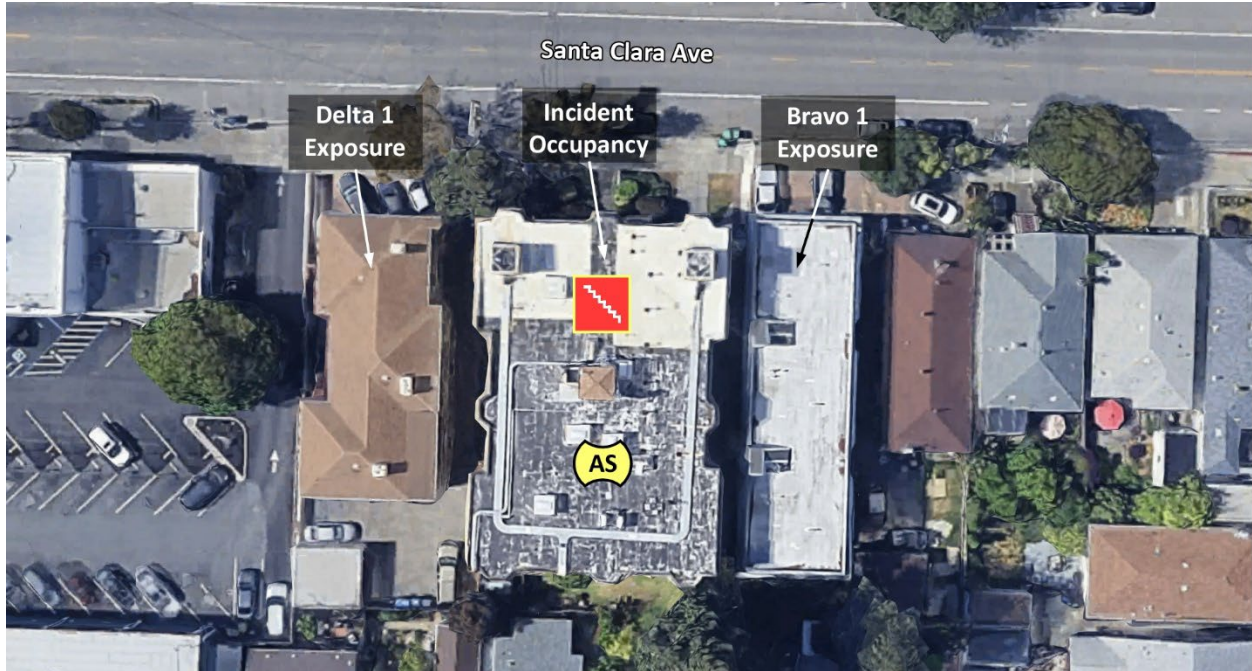
Figure 1. Map of the Incident Area



Note: Adapted from Google. (2026a). [Map, 716 Santa Clara Avenue, Alameda, CA]. Map data ©2026 Google. <https://bit.ly/4bJAGrW>.

The closest hydrant is on Santa Clara Avenue at Webster Street in addition, there are other hydrants in the area are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 2. Aerial View



Note: Adapted from Google. (2026b). [Aerial view 716 Santa Clara Avenue, Alameda, CA]. Imagery © Google, Imagery © Airbus Maxar Technologies, Map Data © 2026. <https://bit.ly/4dcc4dU>.

Figure 3. Alpha/Bravo Corner



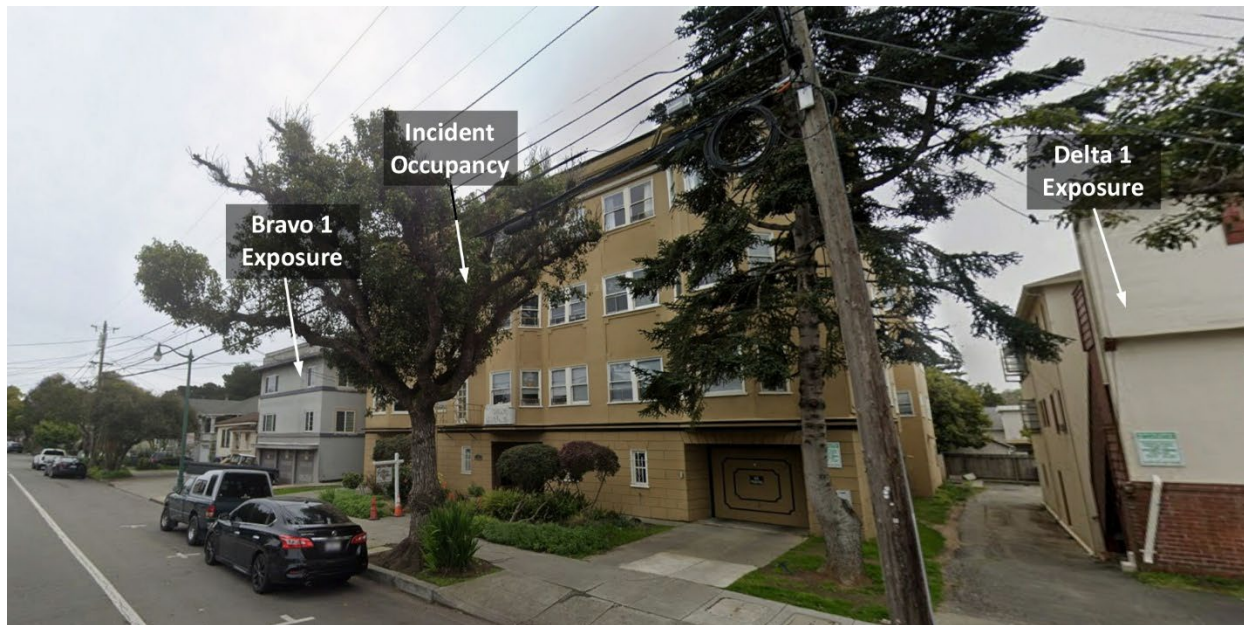
Note: Adapted from Google. (2025a). [Street view 716 Santa Clara Avenue, Alameda, CA]. ©2026 Google. <https://bit.ly/4dLD2Jt>.

Figure 4. Side Alpha



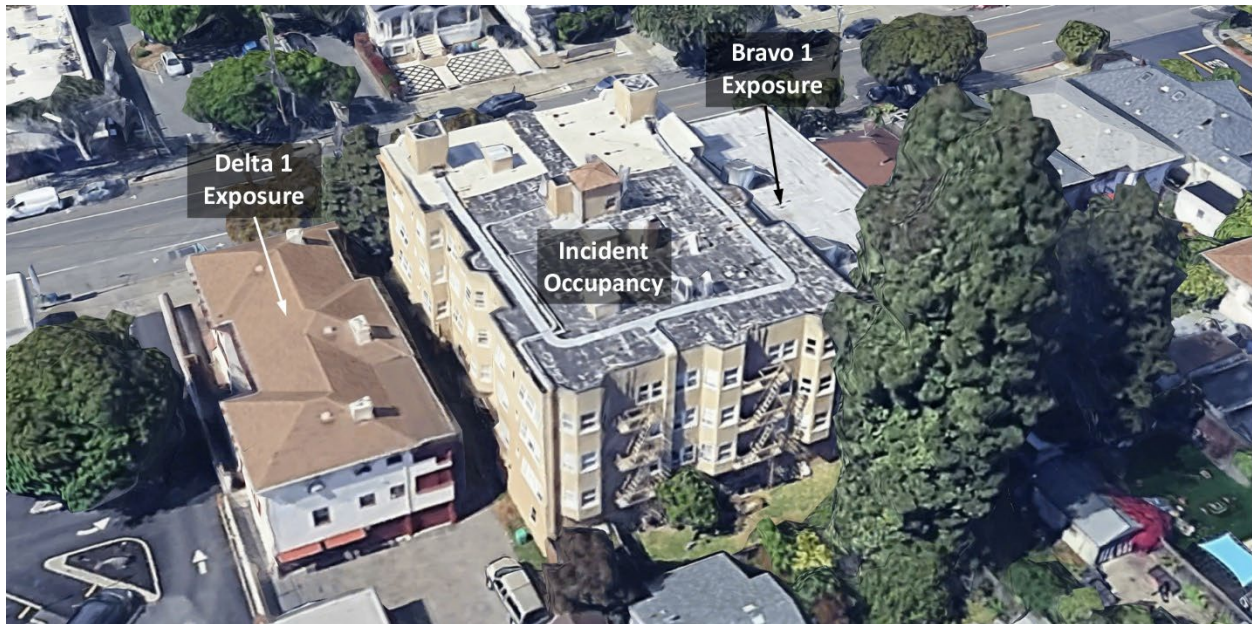
Note: Adapted from Google. (2025b). [Street view 716 Santa Clara Avenue, Alameda, CA]. ©2026 Google. <https://bit.ly/4rVE4pA>.

Figure 5. Alpha/Delta Corner



Note: Adapted from Google. (2025c). [Street view 716 Santa Clara Avenue, Alameda, CA]. ©2026 Google. <https://bit.ly/3NNVYfZ>.

Figure 6. Charlie/Delta Corner



Note: Adapted from Google. (2026c). [3d aerial view 716 Santa Clara Avenue, Alameda, CA]. Imagery © Google, Imagery © Airbus Maxar Technologies, Map Data © 2026. <https://bit.ly/3Pqmd9>.

The incident occupancy is on a commercial corridor with a mix of residential and commercial occupancies. Adjacent blocks consist primarily of detached single-family homes, duplexes, and small apartment buildings. Much of the housing stock dates from the early 1900s through the 1940s, with wood-frame construction. Census data indicate a mix of owner- and renter-occupied housing. The population reflects generally stable residency with some turnover in rental units. English is widely spoken, with a significant proportion of households speaking other languages, particularly Asian and Pacific Islander languages (Open AI, 2026). Fire and emergency medical call volume in this area is typical of other densely populated areas of the community.

The temperature is currently 77° F (25° C) with wind from the west southwest at 6 mph (10 kph). (Weather Underground, 2026). It is Monday, March 16th and you are dispatched along with a medic unit for an emergency medical incident for a patient with difficulty breathing at Casa Blanca Apartments, 716 Santa Clara Avenue at 14:02. Your engine has four-person staffing¹. **You are the officer of the engine company.**

You are familiar with this building and remember that it is a four-story building with parking on the first floor center and corridor apartments on the second through fourth floor. There is an open stairway from the first floor to the fourth floor accessed from Side Alpha.

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

This [simulation video](#) provides prompts to pause the simulation and answer related questions. Each question has a brief prompt that appears in the simulation (e.g. the text “Critical Factors” is a prompt for question 1. Click the link above or scan the QR code to access the incident simulation video.



Time starts now! Answer the first 11 questions within the next 10 minutes. Save discussion until after you have answered these questions.

1. What critical factors would you consider when dispatched and during response? What conversations would you have with your crew during response?
2. Based on the dispatch information and what you know about this occupancy and response area, what do anticipate finding on arrival?
3. Would you change the resource determination (currently your engine and four ambulances)? If so, what would you request?



Important! Answer questions 4 through 11 in the form of communication you would have with your crew, dispatch, other companies, and the first arriving command officer. State the communications exactly as you would say them face-to-face or over the radio. Save explanation or discussion until after you have completed these questions.

4. State your initial radio report (IRR) exactly as you would transmit it to dispatch.
5. 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?

6. Medic 1 arrives on scene. State the tactical assignment you would give them exactly as you would transmit it?

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

8. State your follow up report exactly as you would transmit it to dispatch.

9. Ladder 1 arrives and reports that they are Level 1 at Santa Clara and Webster. State the tactical assignment you would give them exactly as you would transmit it.

10. Engine 2 arrives and reports that they are Level 1 on a hydrant at Santa Clara and Webster. State the tactical assignment you would give them exactly as you would transmit it.

11. 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 eleven before answering the next eight questions. Think about what cues, patterns, or anomalies (differences from conditions that you would anticipate) informed your answers.

12. What information most influenced your expectations?

13. Did anything in the incident post-arrival challenge your initial expectations?

14. What was the actual problem once you arrived?

15. What were your tactical priorities and what was getting in the way of achieving them?

16. During initial operations, was there an immediate threat of serious injury or death to you, your crew, or other companies?

17. Was it reasonable to believe that apartments in this building were occupied?

18. Was there searchable space?

19. If you believed it was reasonable that there was searchable space, what could you do about it?

Listen to the [incident audio](#) (Broadcastify, 2026) before completing the remaining questions. This audio has been edited to remove dead air and as such it has condensed the first 30 minutes of incident communications into just over 13 minutes. Click the link above or scan the QR code to access the incident audio.



20. Based on the reported conditions, did you determine that firefighters in structural firefighting clothing and self-contained breathing apparatus would be able to enter the apartment building to locate additional patients? What critical factors influenced your decision?

21. In this incident, the IC assigned companies to evacuate occupants from the apartment building and adjacent exposures. News reports indicated that a number of these occupants sheltered in place. How did you address the potential hazards to occupants of the building and the exposures? What critical factors influenced your decisions?

22. In this incident the resource determination was upgraded to include a hazardous materials team and the IC declared a Level 1 Mass Casualty Incident (5-15 patients with an anticipated incident duration of less than one hour in the Alameda County emergency medical services (EMS) system). Did you increase the resource determination to include a hazardous materials team, or would you have anticipated that IC #2 would do so? What critical factors influenced, or would influence your decision to request a hazardous materials team or declare an MCI?
23. IC #2 assigned company officer as the “Interior Division” with responsibility for all tactical activity inside the apartment building. This company officer was wearing self-contained breathing apparatus and working with his crew inside the hazard zone. How does this impact on the ability of the company officer to function effectively as a division supervisor?

Additional Learning

Building Construction, Systems, and Arrangement: Take a few minutes and look at photos of the [Casa Blanca Apartments](#) (RentCafe.com, 2026). What building construction, systems, and arrangement characteristics would potentially have impacted the risk to occupants and tactical operations in this incident?

Bear Spray Characteristics: This incident involved deliberate discharge of bear spray inside the apartment building by a disgruntled former tenant. Bear spray and pepper spray are both made with the same active ingredient, oleoresin capsicum along with other (often flammable) inactive ingredients, and flammable propellant (generally propane due to its vapor pressure). Bear spray generally has a higher concentration of the active ingredient and has a greater range with a wide cloud covering 30’ (9 m) to 40’ (12 m) in an open area.

If the specific bear spray is known, a safety data sheet (SDS) may provide information about its chemical constituents. However, sometimes the information on an SDS may be limited (specifying that some materials are “proprietary”) which is less than helpful. Compare the following bear spray SDSs:

- SDS-SABRE Frontiersman Max Bear and Mountain Lion Attack Deterrent (Security Equipment Corporation, 2023).
- SDS-Bear D’Fense Professional (Defense Aerosols, 2024)

Read [Bear Spray - From the Other Side: First aid and other tips](#) (Woodford, 2018), an Alaska Department of Fish and Game blog post. This post is not targeted for fire and EMS professionals but provides an excellent overview of bear spray along with initial treatment and decontamination procedures. Note that the decon procedures outlined differ from the somewhat generic information provided on the bear

spray SDSs. In response to toxic exposures, consider contacting poison control and reference your local EMS protocols for patient care guidance.

Pepper Spray Detection: The presence of capsaicin based pepper or bear spray can be detected using a [pepper spray detection kit](#) (Hazmat Resource, 2026) that contains capsaicin test strips and a liquid reagent. This kit is on the [minimum equipment list](#) for Type 1 Hazmat Teams and optional for Type 2 and 3 Hazmat Teams in California (FIRESCOPE, 2022).



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