



In-Station Training

TM 26-39 Row House Fire



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Purpose

Structurally compromised vacant buildings present significant hazards during firefighting operations including falls through floors or the roof as well as structural collapse. Unfortunately, these buildings are sometimes occupied, presenting a conflict between the possibility of occupants and firefighter safety.

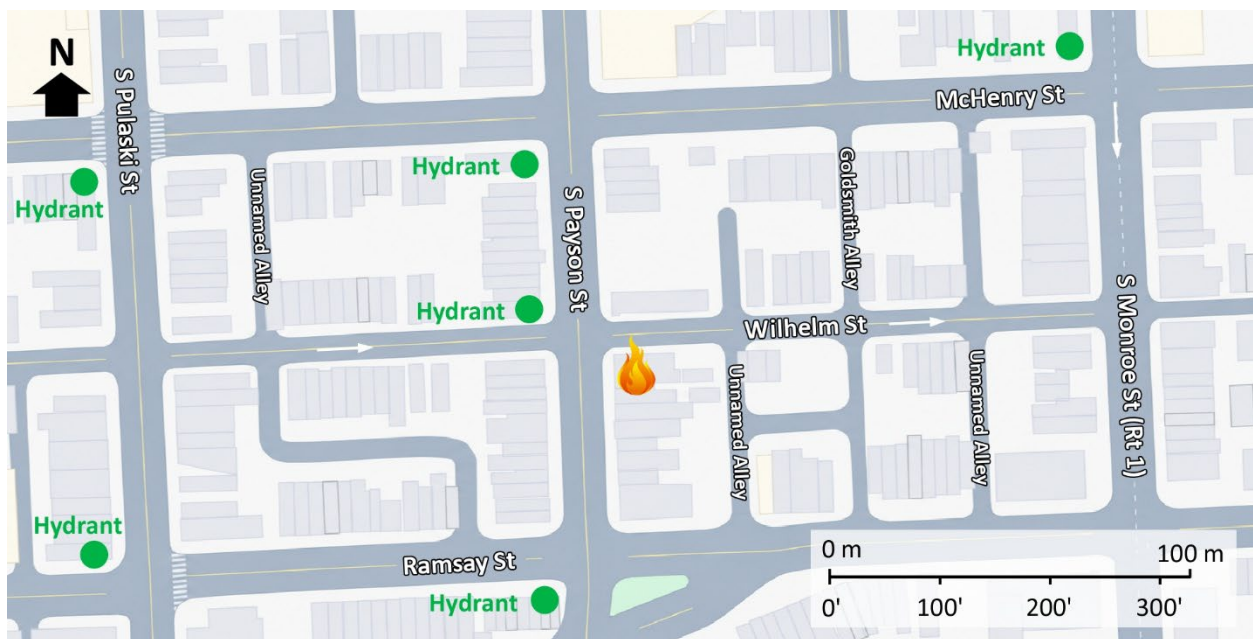
Learning Outcomes

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 a row house fire at 325 S Payson Street, Baltimore, Maryland on Monday, September 14, 2026, at 22:40 (Broadcastify, 2026a, 2026b; & Tall28Guy, 2026). Review the map and photos (Figures 1-7) to gain an understanding of the building and area involved.

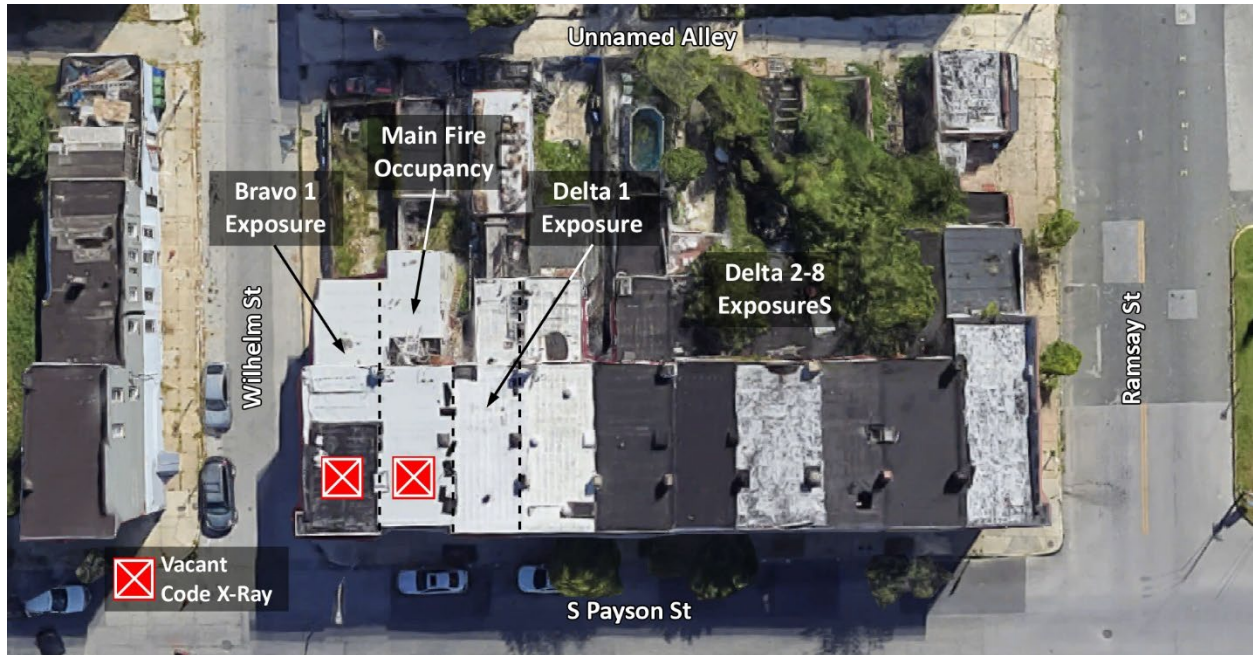
Figure 1. Map of the Incident Area



Note: Adapted from Google. (2026a). [Map, 325 S Payson Street, Baltimore, MD]. Map data ©2026 Google. <https://bit.ly/4y3p10V>.

The closest hydrant is on Wilhelm Street at South Payson Street and there are other hydrants in the area as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 2. Aerial View



Note: Adapted from Google. (2026b). [Aerial view 325 S Payson Street, Baltimore, MD]. Imagery © Google, Imagery © Airbus Maxar Technologies, Map Data © 2026. <https://bit.ly/3SSDQ7x>.

Figure 3. Alpha/Delta Corner



Note: Adapted from Google. (2022a). [Street view 325 S Payson Street, Baltimore, MD]. ©2025 Google. <https://bit.ly/4hkEjr7>.

Figure 4. Side Alpha



Note: Adapted from Google. (2022b). [Street view 325 S Payson Street, Baltimore, MD]. ©2025 Google. <https://bit.ly/4cVs5E2>.

Figure 5. Alpha/Bravo Corner



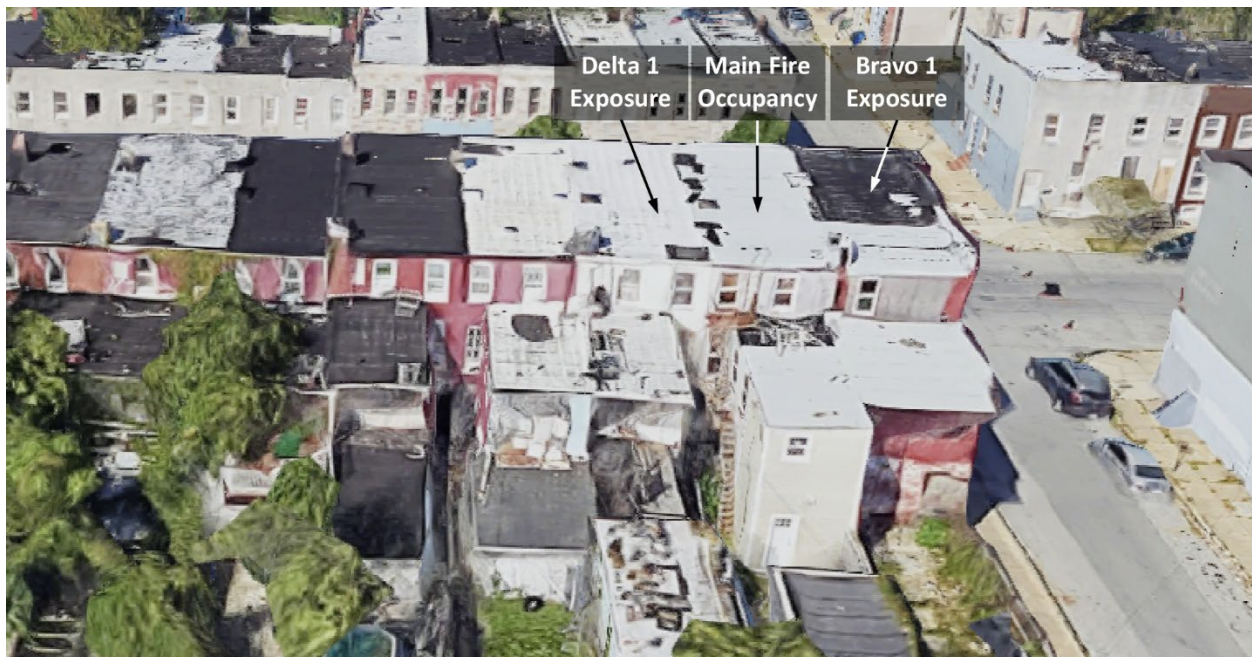
Note: Adapted from Google. (2022c). [Street view 325 S Payson Street, Baltimore, MD]. ©2025 Google. <https://bit.ly/4xxFDNi>.

Figure 6. Bravo/Charlie Corner



Note: Adapted from Google. (2022d). [Street view 325 S Payson Street, Baltimore, MD]. ©2025 Google. <https://bit.ly/4ABEIns>.

Figure 7. Side Charlie



Note: Adapted from Google. (2026c). [3d aerial view 325 S Payson Street, Baltimore, MD]. Imagery © Google, Imagery © Airbus Maxar Technologies, Map Data © 2026. <https://bit.ly/4yPug4D>.

The incident is in an older urban residential neighborhood. The area consists primarily of closely spaced brick rowhouses on a traditional street grid. Most of the buildings in this neighborhood were constructed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Vacant properties are common in the surrounding blocks with multiple buildings identified as structurally unsound (Baltimore City Fire Department designation of Code X-Ray). Vacant buildings are often occupied by unhoused individuals or families. English is the predominant language, with some households speaking Spanish or other languages. (OpenAI, 2026). Fire and EMS call volume in this area is high with fires frequently occurring in vacant buildings.

The temperature is currently 68° F (20° C) with no appreciable wind (Weather Underground, 2026). It is Monday, September 14th at 22:40, and you are dispatched along with four other engines, two ladder companies, a medic unit, and two command officers for a residential fire at 325 S Payson Street. The engine and ladder companies have four-person staffing¹. **You are the officer of the first arriving engine company.**



Time starts now! Answer the first nine questions within the next ten 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?

Immediately after you go enroute, dispatch provides an update that they have a report of persons trapped and that 323 and 325 South Payson Street are Code X-Ray (structurally unsound).

2. Based on the dispatch information and what you know about this occupancy and response area, what do you anticipate finding on arrival?



Important! Answer questions three through nine 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.

¹ If your staffing and deployment are different, use your own resource assignment and staffing.

You arrive from the South on South Payson Street. The ladder company arrives immediately behind you, followed a short time later by the second engine company and command officer. All other first alarm resources will arrive after the command officer. Examine Figure 8 illustrating conditions on arrival and watch the [incident video](#) (Tall28Guy, 2026) from 01:55 to 02:25. Click on the link or scan the QR code to access the video.

Figure 8. Conditions on Arrival



Note: Adapted from Tall28Guy. (2026). Pre Arrival video 300 Blk of S Payson St Baltimore City Md 2nd Alarm. <https://bit.ly/4AnuO38>.

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

4. Ladder 1 arrives and reports that they are Level 1 on S Payson at Ramsay. State the tactical assignment you would give them exactly as you would transmit it.

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?

Law enforcement officers are evacuating residents from the occupied Delta 1 Exposure. Conditions observed from the Bravo/Charlie Corner are illustrated in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Conditions on the Bravo/Charlie Corner



Note: Adapted from Tall28Guy. (2026). Pre Arrival video 300 Blk of S Payson St Baltimore City Md 2nd Alarm. <https://bit.ly/4AnuO38>.

6. Would you change the action you are taking or modify the assignments given to your crew? If so, what task orders would you provide?
7. State your follow-up report exactly as you would transmit it to dispatch.
8. Engine 2 arrives and reports that they are Level 1 on the hydrant at McHenry Street and South Payson. State the tactical assignment you would give them exactly as you would transmit it.
9. 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 nine before answering the next eight questions. Think about what cues, patterns, or anomalies (differences from conditions that you would anticipate) informed your answers.

10. What information most influenced your expectations?
11. Did anything in the incident post-arrival challenge your initial expectations?
12. What was the actual problem once you arrived?
13. What were your tactical priorities and what was getting in the way of achieving them?
14. During initial operations, was there an immediate threat of serious injury or death to you, your crew, or other companies?
15. Was it reasonable to believe that the Main Fire Occupancy and/or the Bravo and Delta Exposures were occupied?
16. Was there searchable space?
17. If you believed there was searchable space and that it was reasonable that the building was occupied, what could you do about it?

The Baltimore City Fire Department uses a standard operating procedure that the first arriving engine and ladder position on Side Alpha and the second arriving engine positions on Side Charlie. Engine 55, the first arriving engine, laid a supply line from the hydrant at South Payson and Ramsay to Side Alpha and placed an attack line in service on Side Alpha. Engine 36, the second arriving engine, laid a supply line from the hydrant at McHenry and South Payson to the Bravo/Charlie Corner and placed an attack line in-service on Side Charlie. Watch the [incident video](#) (Tall28Guy, 2026) from 02:25 to 06:00. Click the link or scan the QR code to access the video.



18. What were the similarities and differences between your incident action plan and that implemented by the Baltimore City Fire Department during the initial stages of this incident? What critical factors influenced your choice of strategy and tactics?

19. Did the dispatch update reporting trapped occupants influence your decision making or tactical assignments? Baltimore City Fire Department standard operating procedures prohibit interior operations in Code X-Ray buildings unless there are credible reports of someone trapped (Karpovich, 2025). Would you consider a report from dispatch as a “credible report”? Why or why not?

20. Did you consider the need for multiple elevated master streams? How could your initial water supply tactics be reinforced to support the operation of multiple master streams?

Additional Learning

There are multiple opportunities for additional learning accompanying this 10-Minute Training including elevated master streams; communications and accountability; and a row house tactical decision game for IC #2.

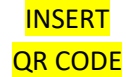
Elevated Master Streams

Elevated master stream operations generally require a coordinated effort between a ladder company and one or more engine companies.

- If you are an engine company officer (or firefighter), get out and practice developing a water supply to support elevated master stream operations.
- If you are a ladder company officer (or firefighter), get out and practice setting up your ladder or tower for elevated master stream operations.
- Now work together and practice integrating engine and ladder operations to deploy an elevated master stream and get overhead water on a fire.

Communications and Accountability

Listen to the incident audio (Hartin, 2026) for the first 20 minutes of incident operations with the members of your crew. This audio has been edited to truncate “dead air” to shorten the length of the video. As you listen to the audio, consider what was done well and identify where communications procedures and practices could have negatively impacted the IC’s or operating companies’ situational awareness and the effectiveness of tactical operations.



Now consider the following five questions:

1. Could you identify the strategy based on the ICs radio communications?
2. Which hydrant was “dead”? How might that information have impacted water supply operations?
3. How many companies reported on the status of primary search in the Delta 1 Exposure?
4. Do you believe that the incident commander had a solid understanding of the location, tactical assignments, and status of the companies operating at this incident? Why or why not? What factors influence your perspective?
5. What actions can you and the members of your crew take as individuals, and as a crew, to improve fireground incident communications and accountability?

Now act on your answer to the last question!

Tactical Decision Game for IC #2

One good way to improve your command competence as a company officer is to train in the role of IC #1 and in the role of IC #2. Practice as IC #2 improves your understanding of the challenges and expectations of command officers, improving your work as a company officer. Have a look at [10-Minute Training 25-40a Vacant Row House Fire](#) (Hartin, 2025) and extend your practice to the role of IC #2.



References

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