

Getting CBRN into Training Exercises

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Dealing with the effects of a chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear (CBRN) attack remains an undertrained task in many units. This article offers some recommendations for commanders to get CBRN into battalion and larger training exercises. It is based on my observations at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) in Hohenfels, Germany, where I served as the senior CBRN observer-coach-trainer (OCT) for more than 10 brigade combat team (BCT) rotations from 2013 to 2016.

Guides for Training CBRN

* **Put at least one chemical strike in your exercise.** This will help train your command post staff, particularly your battle captains and CBRN officer and NCO. The strike will cause confusion and increase stress in the tactical operations center (TOC), but it will also instill confidence and test your CBRN officer. For guidance on how to get a strike into training, consult the higher headquarters CBRN cell. For example, a battalion would go to the brigade CBRN officer. That person can help design a strike for a battalion exercise. If training on basic CBRN skills is an objective, the strike could affect many Soldiers; or if the objective is exercising the command post staff, it could affect only a few. Training at home station in the CS gas chamber is valuable for individual skills (protect yourself with individual protective equipment [IPE], immediate decontamination, unmasking), but the TOC also needs training, particularly the CBRN staff.

* **Notify your CBRN officer (and unit) that there will be at least one CBRN strike during training.** CBRN has been avoided in many units for so long that the CBRN officer becomes solely an operations shop force multiplier, which



Soldiers from 2nd Cavalry Regiment scan their sectors on 24 January 2016 during an exercise at the Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany. (Photo by SSG Eddie Siguenza)

means the officer's skills in chemical warning and reporting atrophy. By giving the CBRN officer fair notice a few months before an exercise that a strike likely will occur, it will force prudent officers to get their CBRN shop in order, which means the CBRN officer and NCO will have downwind hazard overlays made and know how to use them, they will be familiar with persistent and non-persistent agents, and they will have practiced guidance to give downwind units (keep protective gear nearby and monitor with the joint chemical agent detector [JCAD], for example, or go to mission-oriented protective posture [MOPP] IV immediately). Your CBRN officer should review Technical Manual (TM) 3-11.32, *CBRN Warning and Reporting*, to ensure he/she is proficient on plotting downwind hazards. A trained CBRN officer in a high chemical threat environment can help units from unnecessarily putting Soldiers into MOPP gear and thus avoid the resulting heat injuries. Notice of an upcoming strike should also prod your units to improve their own CBRN readiness — the CS chamber, soldier-level tasks, and CBRN equipment may be given a little more emphasis with a chemical strike known to be on the horizon.

* **Deploy with detection and identification equipment.** The brick-sized, OD-green JCAD is the most important piece of CBRN equipment in a unit next to the protective mask and suit. Each company is typically issued one per platoon and one per company headquarters. The JCAD detects and identifies nerve, blister, and blood agents; newer models also pick up toxic industrial chemicals. The JCAD is placed upwind of an assembly area to warn of an approaching chemical cloud. Units often don't train with them or even bring them to training, but employing them upwind of units (including the command post) is a good start. This will force units and CBRN staff to work through the details: JCAD battery life, battery type (lithium or alkaline), spare battery supply, who is placing the JCAD upwind, who is recovering it, who is accountable for it? How does a unit respond to a JCAD alarm? The correct answer for responding to an alarm — to mask and confirm the alarm with an M256 kit — probably isn't known by all Soldiers.



Soldiers of the 2nd Cavalry Regiment's CBRN Reconnaissance Platoon test the air outside of a Stryker for contamination during Saber Junction 17 on 12 May 2017 in Germany. (Photo by SPC Nathaniel Nichols)

Other detection equipment to have on hand includes: M8 paper, a small booklet with individual pages that identify chemical agents when the paper is blotted on them; M9 paper, which looks like wide masking tape and is worn on the wrist and ankle and turns pink or red when it touches chemical agents; and the M256 kit, a small packet with glass ampules that when broken can identify chemical agent clouds. Units may not use this equipment during all exercises, but it is small enough to easily bring along, and it gets Soldiers in the habit of packing their critical CBRN inventory.

*** Employ your CBRN recon assets.** A CBRN recon platoon is typically a brigade asset made up of 12 Soldiers and three vehicles (CBRN Strykers in a Stryker or armored BCT or high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles [HMMWVs] in an infantry BCT). In the difficulty of planning for exercises, CBRN recon platoons are forgotten and consequently during exercises they wind up on gate guard and perimeter security. Ideally, a CBRN recon platoon would have a mission confirming or denying the presence of chemical agents on an axis of advance near the front of the moving formation. The CBRN platoon would then find an alternate, clean route for the forces following them. Another CBRN recon platoon mission could also be identifying a suspected chemical agent or toxic industrial chemical making civilians sick in a nearby town. Get the platoon off the bench: they need missions to run through troop leading procedures and pre-combat checks/inspections to improve as all other units do. To employ the recon platoon in a battalion exercise, for example, use the brigade chemical officer to develop a scenario before the exercise. Or, for a brigade exercise at a training center, enlist the help of the CBRN OCT at the training center a few months before the exercise. Maneuver commanders have enough to coordinate before an exercise to ensure maneuver training objectives are met, but with a request to higher for help with incorporating CBRN training, or a request to the CBRN OCT at a training center, the CBRN recon platoon can also contribute to the fight and get CBRN training.

Other Areas to Consider

* To keep this article brief, I have not reviewed other important areas: decontamination, radiation (in particular dirty bombs), toxic industrial chemicals and materials, and the importance of including your CBRN officer in the military decision-making process to integrate CBRN protection and CBRN assets, for example.

Planning maneuver training and then accomplishing its objectives are tough enough. Adding in CBRN, however, is attainable also. Enlist higher headquarters CBRN staff or training center CBRN OCTs to help construct the CBRN scenarios, notify your unit and CBRN staff well before an exercise that there will be a chemical strike, bring and use chemical detection equipment, and test your CBRN recon platoon by enlisting CBRN help planning platoon missions. These steps will help get CBRN into training.

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