

M451: Decisive Action

Case Study Defense Support of Civil Authorities

1. Scenario

VNN



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EXERCISE

Good morning, welcome to VNN -- local officials are celebrating this morning as a new industrial park is being christened in our community, there's a ribbon-cutting scheduled for 10am this morning. Officials say the new Hampton Industrial Park will bring millions of dollars of new tax revenues and thousands of new jobs to state and local communities. But a group of activists are holding a protest on the street outside the park, they are criticizing the placement of the park in such a populated corridor of the state. They say citizens will be at greater risk now, since chemicals will be transported by truck and rail to and from the park.

VNN spoke with a representative for the chemical park who argued there have been more than 2 million rail shipments of chlorine in the past four decades in the U.S., and only four resulted in fatalities. VNN also contacted the state's emergency manager, Anna Christy, who responded that businesses are far more likely to be impacted by a flood or storm than from man-made incidents. But she added that businesses and community leaders should be prepared for any emergency. Christy invited any organization to contact the state's emergency management agency to work together on community planning.

Respond



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VNN ANCHOR

Breaking news tonight, a hazmat train has derailed and exploded on the Hampton rail line near Pine Road, releasing a large quantity of lethal chlorine gas, this accident occurred less than 20 minutes ago. The plume cloud from the accident is extremely dangerous, it is being carried downwind of the site, toward the East, and is reported to be nearing the Pine Road business district and the residential neighborhoods surrounding it. No word yet on the cause of the accident, but many 911 calls have been received from the scene, and dozens of fire and emergency responders are on the scene and in transit. Now minutes ago our studio here at VNN received a call from an alarmed worker at a building near the accident, reporting he could smell the chlorine and he was feeling burning skin and eyes, and having difficulty breathing. We lost that call though when the signal was dropped, the area's phone lines and cell service providers are being overwhelmed by the volume of calls.

Ladies and Gentlemen, if you are at home or at work, officials are asking that you shelter in place, close the windows and stay indoors. But many residents have not heard these warnings, our traffic cams here in the newsroom are showing a quick rush of traffic away from the area onto local highways. We're seeing a number of accidents now. And we're also seeing fire trucks and ambulances trying to navigate the traffic, another reason to stay at home, stay indoors. Please stay tuned for more breaking news as we receive it.

Scenario: Chemical Accident

- Chlorine rail accident and release of chlorine gas



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There was an explosion on a rail car transporting chlorine to an industrial facility one evening, after 6pm. The explosion released a large quantity of chlorine gas downwind of the site, affecting 100,000 people up to 25 miles away. Downwind populations are required to either evacuate ahead of the plume or shelter in place. Two hospitals in the downwind area require protective action.

Community impacts:

Casualties: Dozens of fatalities; hundreds of severe injuries; thousands of hospitalizations

Evacuations/Displaced Persons:

100,000 instructed to temporarily shelter-in-place as plume moves across region

50,000 evacuated to shelters in safe areas

50,000 self-evacuate out of region

Contamination: Primarily at explosion site, and if waterways are impacted

Infrastructure Damage: Rail lines, nearby highway in immediate explosion area, and metal corrosion in areas of heavy exposure

Economic Impact: Millions of dollars

Recovery Timeline: Weeks

Soldiers from 3rd platoon, 22nd Engineer Clearance Company, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, perform technical search and rescue. “It usually takes them about 30 to 90 minutes to setup,” said George Nieves, an observer/controller from Fox Division Civil Support Training Facility, U.S. Army North. “The most important part is deciding where you want to put all of your equipment.” The first group of soldiers entering the “hot zone” area provides a 360-degree site characterization and situational map to the soldiers in the operation center.

“These guys come out here to render aid to these civilians who are trapped in a situation that requires rescue capabilities that would exceed what a normal fire department can render,” said Capt. Charles Robitaille, 22nd ECC. “So anything that requires technical lifting, heavy lifting, heavy objects,

forcible entry into areas with a great deal of concrete or steel, and any scenario that requires the lowering or raising of victims with rope systems.”

Nieves said the six-person team walks methodically through the site, they are trying to identify where casualties are, what kind of tools are needed to rescue them, extract victims that are easily moved, and provide medical aid. They then radio back to the soldiers outside of the contaminated area about what equipment the next team will need in order to extract the casualty out of the situation. This team also used chalk to write information on the rubble to communicate to the extraction team. One soldier writes a large, visible “V” to identify that there is at least one victim in the area. They also write a number identifying the number of victims and draw an arrow to point to where the casualty is located.

“My soldiers’ responsibilities are to provide technical emergency search and rescue to the American people in order to preserve life and minimize suffering,” said 1st Sgt. Donald Salladay, 22nd ECC. The soldiers in the 22nd ECC have all completed a 72-day course at Florida State Fire College to be Pro Board certified, a nationally accredited certification in fire services and related fields. For the first 55 days, the soldiers learn about the five major disciplines in technical search and rescue; confined space, vehicle machinery rescue, ropes rescue, technology decontamination, and structural collapse. The last two weeks are U.S. Army North driven external evaluations. The reconnaissance team returns back to brief the next team about the situation. This second team will enter the “hot zone” with the necessary tools to start the process of rescuing the victims. Even though they have the reconnaissance from their predecessors, these soldiers have to stay flexible and problem solve. When their initial idea does not work, they quickly move on to the next..

As the rescue team saves each casualty, two soldiers take the casualty back to the casualty collection point. There soldiers call for medical support who then transport the casualty to a facility for further medical care.

Fields of debris, demolished vehicles and bodies laid across an entire town center; words on bed sheets, asking for assistance, hung over the roofs of buildings; and street poles laid fallen, while buildings were covered in plumes of smoke, and homes were submerged in a body of water. On ground, rain beaded up and rolled off the hazmat suits of a reconnaissance element of an urban search and rescue team positioned for initial entry into a collapsed structure, as Gen. Lengyel looked on during his tour of the training environment. As beeps from the teams detection systems signified the presence of gamma radiation, muffled cries for help echoed between displaced cements blocks and crumbled vehicles.

“This is a Defense Support to Civil Authorities,” said U.S. Army Reserve Col. Chris M. Briand, “It is a (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear)-response comprised of three different elements across the active duty, the U.S. Army Reserve and the National Guard.” More than 4,500 service members from 80 units across the nation participated event. In addition to all Army components participating in the exercise, elements from the U.S. Air Force as well as state and federal agencies, and local emergency response forces were involved.

“It really is about readiness in our forces and having the proper capability to respond to a catastrophic event anywhere in the homeland,” said Briand. “And also to be able to develop those partnerships with the local communities and interagency (partners), and to be able to come and save lives, prevent human suffering and mitigate extensive property damage, which are the three tenants of the (DSCA).”

“We’re really talking about protecting the homeland and being ready and capable to respond to America’s next worst day.”

Briand further shared that the military's role was strictly a support role and that they would not be in charge of incidents in a disaster.

"We (the Army) or Soldiers who respond to an event are not in charge," said Briand. "It's the state incident commander who is in charge. We are supporting here.

There is a range of life-saving capabilities such as medical response, decontamination, technical rescue, patient evacuation, communications and logistics support to move people, equipment and supplies by land and air. The service members responded to the incident in support of civil authorities, several days after the incident occurred.

"The biggest take away is the training, the dialogue and the understanding of the expectations of something like this" said Royalty.

Once units arrived on the ground, they established their work sites and sent out CBRN teams to check for radiation and decontamination levels ahead of deploying technical rescue teams to the impacted area.

U.S. Army Reserve Staff Sgt. Ian Kurtinitis, a firefighter with the 468th Engineer Detachment, based out of Danvers, Massachusetts conducted rescue missions in conjunction with the CBRN mass casualty decontamination line.

"Our specific mission is urban search and rescue and specifically, today, to search and rescue a contaminated environment," said Kurtinitis. "There's a subway station that we're working at and there are people trapped inside. Our mission is to gain access, extract patients and to assist anyone that is ambulatory and to extricate those who are non-ambulatory. But, we are coming into this as we're assisting overwhelmed local entities who have been at this for several days."

Kurtinitis further shared that a unique skill of their training is the capability of performing technical rescue operations while in CBRN environment protective gear. He added that although civilian entities are trained in the same technical disciplines and Hazardous Materials teams, typically, civilian partners do not perform technical skill rescue operations while in CBRN protective gear.

"We're firefighters. Our (Military Occupational Specialty) is 12 Bravo, a firefighting unit, so a lot of these skills fall under our skill set, and this builds on it," said Kurtinitis. "We're still executing our job, but we're doing it at a much more technical and advanced level, so the upside is that you have people that want to be here, people that want to do the job, people that want to help others."

"There's never an issue with motivation or discipline. When (Soldiers) are out here working, they're 100 percent of the time going to execute the job that they're here to do," said Kurtinitis. "In an event like this, the added feature is Soldiers get the exposure to patient packaging with a real person. You have to take care of that person because it's a real person that you're bringing out."

Once victims were rescued, they were transported or directed to the mass casualty decontamination line for triage, treatment and then transport to the closest medical facility.

"We sort them into groups to see who needs to go through first," said Spc. Christopher Custer, Combat Medic Specialist with the 409th Area Support Medical Company, based out of Madison, Wisconsin, who was receiving patients after they exited the decontamination tent in the MCD line. "I basically re-sort them to make sure that they're going to the right place for the right amount of treatment. After they are (decontaminated), they come to me and I re-direct them."

U.S. Army Reserve Spc. David Forcier, assigned to the 468th Engineer Detachment, was working on a team for urban search and rescue at a vehicle extrication site.

“There’s been an event and we’re here to rescue the victims out from inside of the vehicles,” said Forcier. “The soldier’s performance is absolutely phenomenal (in regards to) the amount of work that they are doing, and the rotations (that everyone is on). Everyone’s doing a really good job at making sure that we’re taking care of each other, and also taking care of the victims. (There is) a lot of good triage for the victims and making sure that the medical team is waiting for them, so when we extricate those victims, they are well taken care of and we’re working really hard to make sure that every victim gets out in the least amount of time.”

The work primarily focused on search and rescue operations, decontamination and medical support capabilities, but units were also tested on events such as an outbreak of protests from displaced civilian at their facility gates.

“When I approached, everyone seemed mad and slammed on the gate,” said Pfc. Miguel Sanchez, with the 555th Transportation Detachment. “We tried to work with them and tried to work with their leader, but they were incompilant and said that they didn’t have a leader. But you have to do the best that you can and calm them down as much as you can --- Afterwards, the commander arrived.”

“This is all about protecting the homeland. I think it’s excellent for our Soldiers to understand what’s important and how to work with the civilian authorities. Also, to collaborate and communicate with the civilian authorities.”, said Brig. Gen. Michael Dillard.

Maj. Gen. Ray Royalty, commanding general out of Fort Knox, Kentucky and Gen. Joseph L. Lengyel, chief of the National Guard Bureau, met to discuss unit’s response, because it has provided an opportunity to build a relationship with Defense Support of Civil Authorities. This DSCA mission is new for the Army Reserve.

Royalty added that the Army Reserve is building partnerships with the National Guard because of their continuing understanding of DSCA. The Army Reserve, traditionally, did not have any experience with DSCA. However, the National Guard has worked with them for years.

“Over the past couple of years, we started to migrate toward doing some of that, and it just continues to help build our bench on the Army Reserve side,” said Royalty.

“This is a very important. We need to bring our skill set, because we are the only ones that really think about this every day. We are postured all around the United States, so when something bad happens, the people who are going to come to the aid of the first responders are going to be the National Guard,” said Lengyel. “So coming here and protecting the skill sets, the search and rescue, the medical, all that we do here, as part of this, will help us all be ready.”

The Army Reserve’s role in is an important asset for all of the components on the ground here.

“It increases the capabilities across the Army enterprise,” said Royalty. “If you only had the National Guard focus on DSCA, your resources would run out rather quickly, so if you have a larger engagement, and if you have others you could reach out to, you are just building your bench by pulling the Army Reserve in.”

Royalty continued. “It is a seamless action all the way from the mission assignment tasking order.” When anything bad happens, all branches of service and components will respond to an authority called Immediate Response, said Lengyel. Everybody will come, they will save lives. We need to understand how each organization does business and how we work together. When we come together here, we’re able to execute because of training and experience.

“This is the homeland component of our strategic national defense priorities which includes building military readiness as we build a joint force,” said Lengyel.

The site of a devastated community and displaced civilians is an experience many have familiarity with from their response to various hurricane relief efforts. While those experiences lend some lessons learned, this event here is one that delivers a much more volatile event.

“With hurricanes we can somewhat anticipate and have time to prepare,” said Lengyel. “In an event like this you can’t see it coming, so you have to be able to respond basically with no notice to an event that is very complicated. In this particular event where there is radiation and it’s physically dangerous just to be in the vicinity.”

Planning, delivering, and sustaining forces on the ground is a concerted behind-the-scene effort just as critical as the boots on the ground.

“We have to be able to come together and use our training to make sure we have the right capability at the right place,” said Lengyel. “We come together so that the force actually doing the response can keep themselves safe and we can do what we need to do to respond to that incident itself.”

Lengyel came with a message of thanks to the men and women, their families, and their employers that support their service and conveyed a commitment to developing a lethal and innovative force. He took time to recognize soldiers who earned various military coins for their distinguished efforts.

Operations will continue here. In total about 40 units from U.S. states and territories are participating including major headquarters elements: U.S. Army North, Fort Sam Houston, Texas; Joint Task Force Civil Support, Fort Eustis, Va.; 46th Military Police Command, Michigan National Guard, Lansing, Mich.; and 76th Operational Response Command, Salt Lake City, Utah, and soon from the active component the 2-159IN.

2-159 IN conducts road movement along ASR BANE to AO SCOBEE in order to provide defense support to civil authorities responding to the chemical explosion. 2-159 IN provides assistance to local, state, and federal agencies supporting rescue, recovery, and disaster mitigation efforts in AO SCOBEE. 2-159 IN will accomplish the following by conducting a road march despite challenging weather conditions to AO SCOBEE. Upon arrival, 2-159 IN will establish a battalion cantonment area vicinity AA WYVERN. From this central location, companies will conduct DSCA operations based on functional task rather than operational area. A/2-159 IN (SE) will focus on assisting in rescue / recovery operations vicinity ORTING. B/2-159 IN (SE) will be tasked with providing construction support to EN battalions at AAs ROC and HEXAPUMA. C/2-159 IN (ME) will initially assist in erecting the medical facility at AA WYVERN. HHC/2-159 IN will maintain life support facilities for federal personnel assisting state and local government within AO SCOBEE. Line companies will provide a duty platoon on a rotational basis to assist in short notice taskings which may arise based on mission analysis conducted with civil authorities. Throughout this operation, units will remain cognizant of chemical warning status, develop and maintain evacuation plans, and regularly conduct rehearsals in order to prevent casualties from possible chlorine gas.

References:

1. MUSCATATUCK URBAN TRAINING CENTER, IN, UNITED STATES, 04.22.2018, Story by Cpl. Elizabeth Scott , 29th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment
2. <https://www.fema.gov/emergency-planning-exercises>