

NEWS FROM THE CTC

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Unit CBRN Readiness Training – A Way



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The 1st Armored Division conducted its most recent Warfighter Exercise almost completely in mission oriented protective posture (MOPP) level 2. The division's level of proficiency and confidence using MOPP was commendable. The unit conducted all displacements of the division main and support area command posts entirely while wearing MOPP gear. Although leadership emphasis clearly was a driving influence upon the division's chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) training, it was also obvious that the headquarters had trained to attain this level of proficiency. The division's training paid off during the execution of the exercise. This same attitude toward CBRN training can and should be replicated across the Army.

There appears to be a dilemma on how to manage finite training opportunities and best conduct small-unit level CBRN tasks during home station training to ensure units are effectively trained in MOPP gear exchange, selective unmasking, and decontamination. Much of what will be asked of a Soldier against a near-peer threat in a contaminated battlefield will require fighting "dirty" for extended periods of time. Maneuver formations at the brigade level and lower will need to conduct hasty decontamination as far forward as possible in order to continue to sustain operational tempo. Mission success requires proficiency in these basic CBRN skills.

Combat Training Center (CTC) observations indicate units have not prepared adequately at home station to conduct MOPP gear exchange within six hours of being contaminated by a simulated chemical or biological agent. Additionally, units tend to stumble at selective unmasking when the conditions prove favorable for removing the mask. Lastly, units are not proficient with employing the M26 Joint Service Transportable Decontaminating System – Small Scale (JSTDS-SS).

Reversing these trends are not all that herculean when planned, integrated, and conducted properly during training at home station. This newsletter proposes "a way" to conduct this training in a time-constrained training environment. Unit leader emphasis often resolves scheduling conflicts when there are competing priorities for available training time. Additionally, resourceful CBRN NCOs can also leverage existing training events to improve unit CBRN readiness.

MOPP Gear Exchange and Selective Unmasking

All Army units conduct physical training. A CBRN-ready Soldier demonstrates physical and mental endurance. Combining small-unit physical fitness with MOPP gear exchange training is "a way" to reinforce confidence in a Soldier's use of the MOPP system, which also builds familiarization through repetition on how to conduct MOPP gear exchange. For instance, near the end of a platoon/squad physical fitness session, have each Soldier properly don (within the time standard) the Joint Service Lightweight Integrated Suit Technology (JSLIST) — including mask, boots, and gloves — and continue to conduct physical training for an established period of time. Conducting any form of physical activity while in MOPP increases heat stress to the body, so having competent medical experts on hand is recommended.

After a period of physical exertion, at which point the Soldiers will gladly seek opportunities to vent, have the leadership guide their respective formation through each procedure of MOPP gear exchange; conducting selective unmasking last. No small-unit leaders get a free pass; all leaders need to take turns leading this process. Some units, especially those earmarked for assignment to Korea, are already doing this.

Although there are currently no CBRN NCOs at the company level, a good starting point is to train all additional duty CBRN officers and NCOs in MOPP gear exchange and selective unmasking. Units should consider creating laminated cheat sheets that contain pictures to aid the CBRN leadership for each company formation. Then rotate a company per week through MOPP gear exchange during physical training sessions. Over the course of a month, each company would receive focused and supervised training on how to conduct MOPP gear exchange and selective unmasking. This equates to about 12 times in a one-year training cycle for every Soldier to conduct MOPP gear exchange. As the year progresses, the level of difficulty of the physical fitness event conducted in MOPP gear also increases — which serves to improve individual endurance while wearing the MOPP system. This level of integrated training would only add 30-45 minutes over the course of a training day; however, the results would be well worth that investment in time and ultimately would improve unit CBRN performance during CTC rotations.

M26 Decontaminating System

In a similar manner, a current trend at the CTCs is the lack of proficiency on the use of the M26 decontaminating system. These systems, much like a portable pressure washer, are not that difficult to use. Habitual use reinforces solid techniques for vehicle decontamination and drive the importance for unit maintenance of this important system.

Most company and battalion formations conduct motor stables on a weekly basis. Part of motor stables is cleaning vehicles using a hose with water. By introducing the M26 in this recurring event, operator training can be conducted while reinforcing the same outcomes one normally would expect during motor stables—a clean vehicle. This modest investment in training would improve system proficiency while also accomplishing a recurring preventive maintenance checks and services (PMCS) requirement. The M26 operator would need to wear proper equipment while conducting the training. Naturally, this level of training would also need to be supervised by military occupational specialty (MOS)-trained experts. However, over time, non-74 series MOS Soldiers would be conditioned to assume supervision for this training and equipment maintenance. Furthermore, this training would build on a solid core of Soldiers from which to assign to the M26 decontamination teams within a unit.

CBRN training is not all that taxing if conducted in concert with other training events. In the preceding paragraphs, “a way” has been described that applies CBRN collective tasks to existing training requirements. Over time, this method will boost confidence in Soldier CBRN individual competencies and improve unit CBRN readiness. As unit CBRN NCOs experiment with CBRN training at home station, please share your successes and best practices via the CBRN Community of Practice in the Joint Lessons Learned Information System (JLLIS).