

December 18, 2024

To: Mayor and Members of City Council
From: Sheryl M.M. Long, City Manager **202402565**
Subject: Moving the Bomb Squad Out of the Mill Creek Corridor

REFERENCE DOCUMENT #202401577

On June 12, 2024, the Council referred the following for a report:

MOTION, submitted by Councilmembers Jeffreys, Walsh, Albi, Owens, Parks, Johnson and Cramerding, To address concerns of Mill Creek Corridor neighborhoods about the impact of the Bomb Squad at the Fire Training Center, **WE MOVE** that the Administration report back to Council within sixty (60) days on: Plans to relocate the Bomb Squad's storage and detonation operation to a facility outside of a residential area and school zones. Share any costs that might be associated with the move and potential timing.

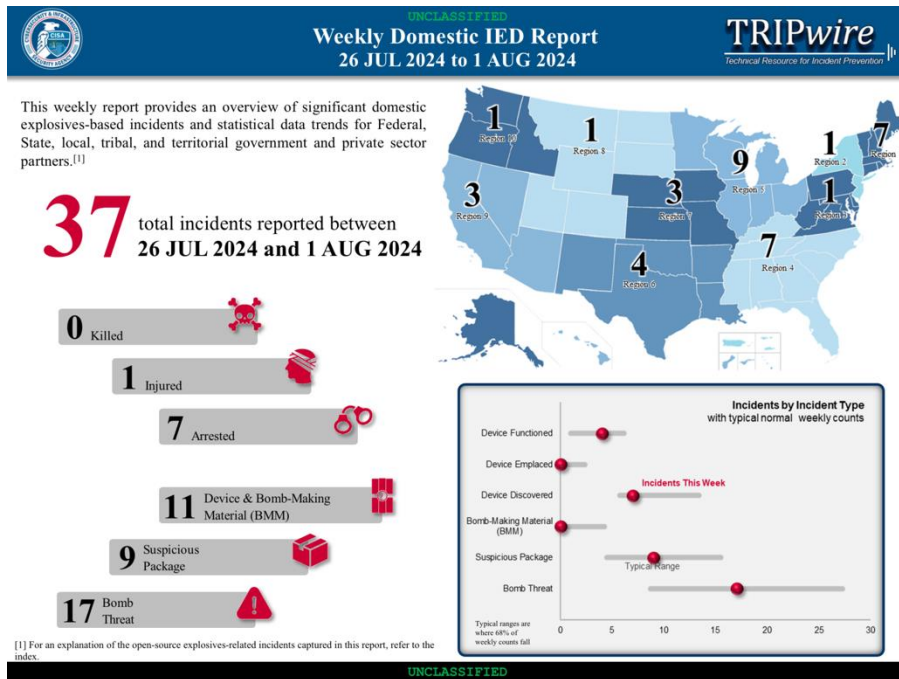
Executive Summary

The current Cincinnati Fire Department (CFD) bomb squad training area is used infrequently for explosives training. Moving to a new site would require the purchase of a minimum of 5-acre site with improvements and buildings placed, costs for which could run \$5-10M depending on location. Fire has options to continue to minimize impacts at the current site by training in other locations when possible and coordinating more closely with all stakeholders whenever use of the local site is needed.

Why do we have a bomb squad?

The City of Cincinnati is a major city with both the blessings and challenges that come from our role as a regional leader. With our high profile, we are subject to the threats of bad actors who challenge the fabric of a community. In a recent DHS Terrorism Advisory System briefing, local governments were advised "The United States remains in a heightened threat environment. Lone offenders and small groups motivated by a range of ideological beliefs and personal grievances continue to pose a persistent and lethal threat to the Homeland".

This summer notes that our FEMA region five experienced the highest number of bombing incidents of any region in the US. Both the local Threat and Hazard Incident Risk Analysis (THIRA) and the county Mitigation Plan list bombing incidents as threats to the community. The FBI regularly states that attacks of this type should be considered "when, not if" they occur in our city. Additionally, there is a requirement for providing bomb response and investigation resources for large events such as NFL games or MLS matches.



EOD Unit Definitions and history

The CFD has maintained an Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) unit for nearly 50 years. Commonly referred to as the Bomb Squad, the unit is comprised of Cincinnati Firefighters whose mission is to investigate, locate, and render safe any explosive or potentially explosive materials, whether or not they are placed by criminal means.

The EOD unit's members are trained by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) following extensive screening and background check processes. The EOD unit is staffed by bomb technicians 24/7/365 from CFD headquarters at 430 Central Ave. downtown. The unit responds to nearly 100 incidents per year and also conducts safety screenings at all large city events such as festivals and sporting events.

Interestingly, the EOD Bomb technician's primary duty is as a firefighter. The on-duty bomb technicians' staff CFD Engine 14, which responds to nearly 4,000 fire and EMS incidents per year in the Central Business District. When needed, those same firefighters staff the EOD unit and respond to calls throughout the city and greater Cincinnati region. Performing a dual role allows for the department to maintain this advanced capability within our normal operating budget and resources.

EOD Site Locations and use

The CFD's bomb technicians train regularly on tools and equipment used to keep our community safe. Training takes place in a variety of locations varying on the requirements of the job and the latest research into incidents involving explosive and incendiary devices. Much of this training involves the use of the department's robotics and detection equipment, none of which involves the use of live explosives.

Despite the infrequency of explosions, the CFD's EOD unit is prepared to train on the use of explosives. Currently, the department maintains space at the Fire Training Center located in South Cumminsville. The training area consists of a small equipment building, a secure storage area and open space for training evolutions.



- EOD Training Site



- Fire Training Site

EOD Training operations including frequency and type of explosions

While EOD training is constant, use of explosives in training is rare. Because the CFD's EOD unit partners with federal agencies to provide services, all explosions by the CFD, including training, are reported to the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) using their Bomb-Arson Tracking System (BATS). For the last 18 months, only three explosions of any type from our South Cumminsville facility were reported by CFD to BATS. One was a detonation to destroy homemade explosives recovered from an incident, and the other two were for training purposes, known as PAN (Percussion-Actuated, Non-electric) shots. The so-called PAN shots are used by bomb technicians to disrupt or destroy bomb components, typically using water. While PAN shots are technically not explosions, they do involve a small amount of explosive material, and the result is a loud report similar to a firecracker. Any other loud noises heard in the area could be from a variety of other sources, including from the fire training facility, industrial facilities in the area, or from the nearby rail yard.

EOD Training site requirements

Due to the nature of explosives training, finding a suitable site can be challenging. ATF guidance lists as much as 500 feet of clearance in all directions for certain training activities. The current site for EOD training experiences limitations on these clearances, and the

additional concerns of the Fire Department around the nearby Mill Creek waterway, residential areas and the increased activity at the Fire Training Center itself. These limitations are a key reason that the current training site is used by the EOD Unit in a limited manner.

Despite limitations, the current training site does have immense value to the EOD operation. The site is located in the community, which allows staff to train on duty while remaining available for emergencies, negating the need to pay overtime or additional costs. Use of the local site also ensures that the EOD unit, the Fire Department and the City comply with all laws and standards around this training, and the use of the unit's tools and materials.

Local Options for EOD training

Due to existing partnerships with other local agencies, there are some limited opportunities for the CFD EOD unit to utilize other facilities for some, but not all, explosives training. The first option is to use the Hamilton County Sheriff's firearms range in Colerain Township. Unfortunately, this range has many of the limitations as our current site, in terms of size, and is also limited by scheduling conflicts with the Sheriff's use of the range for their own training needs. We are also unable to store tools and materials at this site, which leads to additional logistical issues anytime training occurs. Another option is the use of the Butler County Sheriff's range. This site offers a larger clearance area, but is a considerable distance from the city, which will cause response and scheduling problems for our EOD unit. The Butler County site also has the same storage and scheduling conflicts as use of the Hamilton County Site.

Requirements for replacement EOD site

Ideally, a site could be created that would allow for full-scale EOD training in accordance with applicable standards and the needs of the community. Requirements for such a site include the following:

- Large site, five-acre land area
- Security fencing around entire perimeter and interior fencing around range area
- Construction of storage building, including restroom and decontamination showers, etc.
- Placement of ATF compliant storage magazines
- Site utilities including lighting, network and security systems
- Site work including access roads, grading and building earthen berms for explosive range

Public Notifications and resources for community involvement

Due to the nature of the EOD mission, not every part of the bomb squad's work can be conducted within public view. However, the Cincinnati Fire Department wants to ensure that we are as open as possible with how, when and why we conduct our EOD training and operations. While the CFD performs some regular notifications whenever we conduct detonations at the training site, this procedure should be enhanced to include public notifications via the Cincy Alert system. The CFD should also commit to using the Fire Training Center in ways that minimize disruptions to the nearby neighborhood. This commitment should include coordination with the nearby school and Community Council leadership so that we can work to strike an appropriate balance between conducting vital training and striving for a positive quality of life in our neighborhoods.

Safety is vital to the community and the EOD mission

Use of explosives is inherently dangerous. The primary mission of the CFD is to protect lives and property, and the EOD mission places the safety of the public and our technicians as the highest priority during operations. The CFD EOD unit works to incorporate safety into every operation by the following actions:

- Conduct a safety briefing prior to any explosive detonations
- Utilize the minimum amount of explosive material to achieve operational objectives.
- Restrict use of devices to trained and authorized personnel with the highest level of training on site.
- Set and secure an operational perimeter to keep everyone clear.
- Use technology such as PAN shots which minimize flying or dangerous debris from explosions
- Coordinate explosions with local stakeholders or those on scene.

The CFD will also work to continue to minimize explosive use throughout the city.

Invitation to demonstration

Many times, seeing is believing. The CFD would like to invite council members and involved stakeholders to tour the EOD training area at the Fire Training Center, and to participate in a demonstration of a PAN shot as described above. We want our community members to know the advanced capabilities of the CFD to respond to bombing or explosive incidents, and we trust our community leaders to make their own informed decisions about the impact that EOD training activities have on the public.

cc: Virginia Tallent, Assistant City Manager
Frank McKinley, Fire Chief