



Public Safety Bomb Squads across the country routinely face funding cuts and personnel shortages. While this is hardly a new development, the COVID pandemic has certainly compounded these issues and have forced squads to make some hard cuts and shift priorities. Unfortunately, when the workload increases and resources are reduced, the proper training of our first responders becomes less of a priority. The result is a dramatic increase in the risk to the bomb tech and the public.

It cannot be overstated that training is one of the most important priorities for a bomb squad. Effective training is high quality, goal orientated with a logical progression. Time spent on training must be focused on the realistic threats we face, and the procedures used to counter these threats. EOD/Bomb technicians take a very analytical approach when responding to a threat. This is not only highly encouraged, but a necessary skillset to be successful in our field. Unfortunately, it can have the adverse effect of the tech falling into the “What if?” trap. In other words, focusing solely on the possible instead of the probable. In many cases, we have lost sight of some of our most basic, crucial skills. A prime example of this is threat assessment. All EOD/bomb techs have heard the term threat assessment but very few understand it and even fewer use it. From HDS to advanced training courses, the term threat assessment is thrown around often but rarely does the subject get the attention it deserves. Threat assessment is a vitally important core skill, and every operator should be able to apply it to every aspect of an operation.

So, what is threat assessment and how does it apply to the EOD/bomb tech world? In short, threat assessment is the foundation for your operational planning. It’s a determination based on facts, not assumptions. It’s probable vs possible and it’s the world all EOD/bomb techs should be operating in. The central goal of threat assessment is to determine how a device functions and it begins with a few simple questions. Who, what, when, where, why and how questions. What is it? Where is it? Why is it there? Who or what is the target? How does it function? Use all available information from the scene, witnesses, intelligence, and your experience to help answer these questions. Once you start answering these questions, you begin to have a better understanding of what you are dealing with. Then we apply some common sense to the incident, focusing on the probable vs possible, and a plan will begin take shape. A proper threat assessment will help develop the safest and most efficient course of action. Starting an operation with “let’s just send the robot down and see what we have” is not a plan. In fact, it is the opposite of a plan. Your plan should cover every step of the operation from start to finish and everything in-between. The plan should be flexible with threat assessment continually applied when new information becomes available.

I encourage everyone in the EOD/bomb tech training community, especially instructors, to incorporate threat assessment into all aspects of your training. Use realistic scenarios that will make techs think through a problem. For example, if you are training on manual access techniques, provide some type of information or scenario that drives a course of action. Don’t make training just a drill with accessing a container as the goal. Provide information that allows them to conduct a threat assessment and develop a plan. If everything is an unknown, then anything could be possible. That is not realistic and could push the tech to conduct unnecessary actions and increase the chance of making a mistake. Yes, manual access training should be about mastering specific skills and techniques but more importantly it should be about knowing when you should or should not use certain techniques.

Training should make us think, allow us to assess the situation, and most importantly learn how to develop and apply a logical plan before acting. Working as an EOD/bomb tech is a difficult and dangerous profession. Let’s not make the job more difficult with insufficient training. Make time for effective training. Create training scenarios that are challenging yet realistic to benefit our bomb techs and do not promote the development of training scars.