

THE ROLE OF CBRN OFFICERS AND NCOs IN THE CHEMICAL CORPS TRANSFORMATION

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Imagine that you are working as a chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) officer or noncommissioned officer (NCO) in a division, brigade, or battalion and you are about to deploy. Your commander says that your CBRN input to the military decisionmaking process (MDMP) is unnecessary. At this point, you respectfully reply, “Sir, I disagree.”

This article describes the desired involvement of CBRN officers and NCOs at the staff level. Personnel at this level are on the front lines of the Chemical Corps transformation; therefore, they must be professional, knowledgeable, capable, and confident. Most of all, they must be proud to be members of the Chemical Corps.

As brigade CBRN trainer observers/controllers at the National Training Center (NTC), Fort Irwin, California, we seldom see a CBRN section arrive ready to do their job. At the NTC, CBRN sections are faced with many non-CBRN duties. However, while multitasking is key to leadership, it is imperative that CBRN advisors know their primary jobs (ensuring that their units are prepared to respond to any CBRN situation, intelligently briefing the roles and capabilities of their units, and advising their commanders) and that they provide CBRN input into MDMP and counterinsurgency operations. They must be involved in the right traditional and targeting (cyclic) MDMP meetings, briefings, and staff working groups. Unfortunately, few CBRN advisors are able to attain this degree of involvement. Consequently, the desired level of CBRN integration into operations does not often exist.

Although there is only a slim chance that our enemies will use conventional chemical weapons against us, that possibility must be considered. However, our focus should be placed on the unconventional ways that our enemies might target us. For example, we should concentrate on improvised explosive devices that could contain chemicals. We should also direct our attention to releases other than attacks, which might involve toxic industrial chemical, toxic industrial biological, or toxic industrial radiological materials. As a CBRN advisor, you can assist in these situations by employing available equipment and capabilities to identify and categorize the materials. You can inventory the materials and periodically monitor the sites to ensure that they remain inaccessible to the enemy. You must be aware of the possible consequences of breaches in site security (ranging from a loss of use of facilities, to military and civilian casualties due to exposure to contamination) and

be able to explain them in detail. Ultimately, you can provide advice regarding the area of operations by determining which sites should be protected, which sites require cleanup, and which sites should be destroyed. If you fail to properly advise, you are not doing your job as a CBRN officer or NCO. Finally, you can establish a consequence management plan in the event that an attack or a release other than attack occurs in the operational environment.

The Chemical Corps is technical, complex, and critical to mission planning. The Corps is changing fast, and it takes constant effort to keep current. Through the continued presentation of, attendance at, and participation in courses such as the CBRN Dismounted Reconnaissance Course, Technical Escort Course, and Civil Support Skills Course, the Chemical Branch will remain necessary and the Soldiers in it will continue to be respected subject matter experts. Additional suggestions for Chemical Corps Soldiers to remain up to date and effective include reading new manuals, keeping up with related news topics, and making the most of every learning experience available.

The changes that are taking place in the Chemical Corps are for the better. The Department of Defense is spending money to develop new equipment, build new facilities, and train a new generation of CBRN Soldiers. As a CBRN Soldier, it is important that you are not left behind. Since you may be the “lone CBRN voice” in a unit, it might be difficult to get the message across. But quitting is not the answer; rather, the answer is to exhibit an advanced understanding of the operational environment and to truly know what you are talking about. When it comes to the unit’s ability to effectively respond to a CBRN event, all eyes are on you. Therefore, it is imperative that you are familiar with all aspects of your job. History will be the judge of how you performed your duties. ●●●

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