



349th Chemical Company Trains With New Equipment

A Soldier decontaminates a vehicle using the new M26.

By Sergeant Amanda Solitario

It was just an ordinary day in August for the Soldiers who were huddled in laughter and chatter—until the news from the reconnaissance patrol crackled through the radio. Soldiers from the 349th Chemical Company had suffered a notional chemical attack just outside the perimeter. Word spread quickly throughout the camp. Those inside leapt to their feet; hastily donned mission-oriented, protective-posture gear; and established a decontamination site. The mission, which capped a three-day training exercise designed to hone the reconnaissance and decontamination skills of 349th Soldiers at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, showcased a new piece of decontamination equipment that was first seen by the Soldiers just the previous day.

The M26 Joint Service Transportable Decontamination System—Small-Scale is a high-pressure power washer designed to decontaminate vehicles that have been exposed to chemical or biological agents. It replaces the M17 Lightweight Decontamination System.

Units that were once primarily worried about protection against weaponized chemicals are now concerned about the possibility of toxic industrial chemical and toxic industrial material attacks, since the enemy is now using whatever chemicals can be found under the kitchen sink. Modifications to equipment are just one way that chemical units are evolving in the face of the changing battlefield.

The new M26 operates with a push-start and runs on one fuel, so Soldiers can now begin decontamination procedures almost immediately. And the M26 seems to be more efficient in chemical and biological environments, where speed and reaction time are critical. Such modifications to equipment ultimately result in adjustments to training.

While the decontamination section received instruction on the M26, the reconnaissance platoon trained for a potential civilian mission of assisting emergency services in the event of a chemical attack on U.S. soil. This “white mission” is an additional duty that is rotated among military chemical units across the country. The 349th expects to receive that additional duty soon.



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A Soldier trains with a chemical agent monitor in a mock hazmat zone.