



Roseville Galleria Fire and Weapons Training in a Bomb Suit

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Just after 10 a.m. on October 23, in Roseville, California, 23-year-old Alexander Piggee entered the Galleria Mall and went to the GameStop store on the second floor. Piggee ended up barricading himself inside the store and is accused of starting a fire that caused millions of dollars in damage. Additionally, Piggee was in possession of a backpack and witnesses stated that the suspect made statements to the effect of blowing the place up.

In response to the situation, the Roseville Bomb Squad, as well as the Placer County Bomb Squad, responded. Initially upon arrival, the Bomb Technicians on the scene prepared to enter the Mall in Bomb Suits with SCBA's on, in an attempt to locate the suspect's backpack and attach a line to it in order to pull it out of the area for further examination and render safe procedures. The Mall was on fire and the overhead fire suppression system was functioning at this time.

The Bomb Squads were held back as there was a suspected second suspect in the area, and the local SWAT team was not in possession of SCBA's and able to cover the Bomb Techs entering. The Bomb Techs were willing to have one of their own, in a bomb suit, cover the other tech, but this idea was rejected. Fire fighters on the scene were prevented from entering with a possible explosive device inside, and opted for having overhead aerial ladder trucks put water on the area from what eventually became an exposed fire through the roof.

During this operation, the Roseville Bomb Squad used their Allen Vanguard MKII, but as the fire progressed, the roof collapsed on it, and it became a total loss. The Placer County Bomb Squad deployed their Remotec Andros F6A, but due to the large amount of smoke and the constant flood of water from the overhead suppression system, visibility was nearly non-existent and the robot became flooded, and they began to lose re-



note communication with it. They were able to pull their robot out with only minor damage. Eventually, firefighters were able to put the fire out and the backpack was located in the carnage.

The situation created some questions within our Area Unit as to how we could respond to a similar event in the future. We have been faced with a suspected suicide bomber in the past, and it raised the issue of having a Bomb Tech with a weapon cover another Bomb Tech who worked on the suspected device. We have also discussed how we would respond, and with what protective gear, if we were faced with an active shooter and suspected explosive devices.

So the question is: Can you effectively shoot an array of Department-issued weapons and protect yourself or others while dressed in a bomb suit? If you can't, what has to be sacrificed during a multi-hazard incident in order to accomplish the desired resolution?

In this light, the Placer County Bomb

Squad, who was hosting one of our bi-monthly training sessions, decided to have a range day in bomb suits. We went to their indoor range, and with the assistance of one of their range masters, Troy Minton-Sander, rotated each of the Bomb Techs into a bomb suit and practiced drawing and firing a handgun.

There were only a couple of options that we went with for securing a holster to the Bomb Tech. Agencies either used a drop-leg holster, or a molle holster set up on the front of the bomb suit. The Sacramento Police Department went with the holster secured to the bomb suit with flex ties instead of a commercial unit. All options worked well and allowed the Bomb Tech to easily access his firearm and engage a target.

In shooting, we practiced from close-in, and out to fifteen yards, with unsupported one-hand shooting and supported two-hand shooting, as well as shooting on the move and from a kneeling position. We found a variety of reactions. Some Techs tended to lean back in their shooting stances to get proper sight alignment. We found that the EOD 9 bomb suit helmet limited vision more than the older EOD 8 helmets. Also, depending on the build of the Bomb Tech, the front armor panels appeared to prevent some from coming to a solid two-hand shooting stance. Some Techs preferred a shooting stance unsupported with one hand as opposed to the support hand position. I personally found that shooting in a modified weaver stance worked well for me.

Our most accurate shooting came from the Yolo County Bomb Squad, who were using a handgun fitted with a laser sight so they didn't have to concern themselves with the gun's sight alignment to accurately engage a target. Also, we had some outstanding shooting from El Dorado County Tech Jared Melton who shot accurately with the metal blast shield in place on the helmet. It appeared that everyone was able to shoot fairly accurately and adapt well to the amount of time in the bomb suit during shooting.



We brought along long guns to see what the feasibility would be in having one in a bomb suit. What we found was that we had trouble slinging the weapon with the slings that we currently have, and determined that if you were going to sling the weapon, it may be better to use a single point sling set up. Additionally, sighting a long weapon was difficult, and impossible with a regular full stock. The only long weapon we had that could reasonably be brought up to a good firing position was an AR-15 with a collapsible stock. This weapon could be brought up to a center chest position, but you were unable to use the iron sights and would need an elevated optic in order to accurately engage a target.

We followed up our range shooting with simulation training. The scenario involved an active shooter with a victim with an explosive device. Squads were left to decide what protective gear they would wear and if they would arm all Techs going in, or provide cover officers for the Tech working with the explosive device. We had a variety of decisions. Some had all Techs in bomb suits with cover officers armed. Others opted for one tech in a bomb suit with the cover officers more mobile in other body armor, and some opted for all techs in body armor to remain more mobile and in order to keep the victim bomber calm.

Additionally, what render safe equip-

ment or diagnostic equipment would you take with you based on the scenario given. During this training, the Placer County Bomb Squad had a surprise thrown at us. A suicide bomber would enter the scene with a device strapped to his chest and had to be eliminated immediately. With our training, and what we constantly throw out to other officers about engaging a suicide bomber with head shots, you would think we would engage the suspect with head shots. Nope, everyone of us except one officer, shot the suspect multiple times in the open areas of the chest.

Every team did engage the suicide bomber, and for the purposes of the exercise the bomber was incapacitated. This again posed a dilemma for the teams. The team now had two subjects with two bombs, and still had to protect themselves from any other potential threat.

We found this training beneficial in that it made us evaluate how we could respond to these types of situations, and gave us some practical training if we had to gear up to cover another Bomb Tech. We are now talking about making this an annual training event, and how to expand on it. I recommend you try it, if you haven't already.

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