



PRESS RELEASE

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Alaska National Guard hosts 24 countries at Pacific Environmental Security Forum

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — The Alaska National Guard, in conjunction with U.S. Pacific Command, hosted the 2017 Pacific Environmental Security Forum in Anchorage May 9-12, welcoming more than 100 civilian and military representatives from 24 nations in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region.

The 4-day event provided an opportunity for participants to discuss environmental security considerations in a military context. Topics included climate change, water security, waste, energy and biodiversity protection. The 2017 PESF provided an open venue for militaries in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region to work with their civilian counterparts on enhancing environmental security, protection, and management in the region.

Chris Sholes, the environmental program manager for USPACOM and PESF event director, shared that a key objective for the forum was to build environmental security awareness and technical procedures in the region that would help ensure sustainable environmental management.

“PESF is a priority because, increasingly, the Indo-Asia-Pacific region is under threat from environmental security issues; be it man-made or natural disasters, or accumulated problems such as waste management,” said Sholes. “I would like for participants to trust that there's a larger community that cares about what they face, to understand that there is help available of a collaborative nature.”

Justin Pummell, a geographer with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Institute for Water Resources, and a PESF event coordinator, said the intent of the forum was not only to increase awareness among nations in the region, but to discuss best practices, learn from each other, and identify opportunities for militaries in the region to support ongoing and future environmental programs.

“PESF is important because it provides a formidable opportunity to connect with our partners on a topic that isn't often discussed between civil and military audiences,” said Pummell. “This is the seventh year that PACOM has led the environmental security charge in the Indo-Asia-Pacific area and every year it's gotten more comprehensive and more action-oriented, so we've really moved from a community of discussion to a community of action.”

PESF included subject matter expert presentations, panel discussions and group activities. The event fostered collaboration among participating nations to help gauge successes and gaps in current methods, determine opportunities for process improvement and identify real-world projects to address priority concerns.

Each day of the forum featured guest speakers from different countries, who spoke on a variety of warranted topics and concerns. Speakers included Brig. Gen. Aziz Mohammed, deputy commander for

the Republic of Fiji Military Forces; Captain Pujitha Sugathadasa, commander of the Sri Lanka Navy Dakshina Naval Base; a project team leader from the Nepalese Army; and an engineering officer from Timor L'este, a Southeast Asian nation that occupies half of the island of Timor, which is between Indonesia and Australia. There were also speakers from South Korea, Mongolia, Vietnam, Malaysia and China, in addition to several guests from U.S. agencies and other countries.

The subject matter experts described concerns, challenges and examples of solutions regarding ocean acidification, changing wildlife habitats, oil spill response, mangrove restoration, high-elevation glacial melt and negative effects of the resulting glacial lake. Guest presenters also spoke about efforts to counter wildlife trafficking, improve groundwater resources and storage, and the secondary positive outcomes of ensuring clean drinking water.

Three top environmental concerns are resilience to natural disasters, water security and waste management, said Sholes.

“The negative impact of flooding in Bangladesh has gone from thousands dying during and after a flood event to fewer than a dozen dying, in part due to collaborative efforts to improve disaster response,” said Sholes. “Clean water and access to water is another big issue that takes a multinational approach to solve.”

The forum included biodiversity work group activities and site visits that enforce PESF themes and demonstrate military roles. The forum featured an environmental project concept development assembly, allowing various countries to identify key projects or topics where the military may be able to collaborate with civilian agencies and other nations to solve problems.

Forum participants toured several facilities on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, including the Anchorage Methane Power Plant. Decomposing garbage from the Anchorage Regional Landfill creates methane gas, which is funneled to the power plant through a 6,000-foot pipeline and used to produce electricity.

“Pulling that off-gas that clearly contributes to greenhouse gas emissions—because methane is a very toxic petro chemical for the environment and atmosphere—is a huge success story and very encouraging for a lot of the countries,” said Sholes. “Waste and managing 21st-century waste for a lot of these societies, including our own, is a real big problem and so whether it's a waste to energy solution or recycling remedy, or minimizing your waste footprint, we need to find solutions and do what we can to help others do the same.”

Ultimately, PESF exists to address relevant and important concerns, and allows nations who share the same region of the world to learn from each other and help each other, said Sholes. He said the hope is that the forum will help establish priorities for countries in the region and provide USPACOM with “bona fide real-world environmental security projects that will help others in the region build capacity.”

“Whether it's techniques and procedures on how to get through scenarios or building their military's capacity to deal with environmental matters of a material and training nature, we hope to accomplish this while also supporting the civil communities,” said Sholes.

“We aren't able to take millions of dollars to solve some of these problems, but we can begin the conversation to use our engineers to help design solutions with them, and then with various [non-government organizations] throughout the world and magnanimous groups that have more money than the U.S. can part with, hopefully we will begin a conversation that others can help end with positive results,” said Sholes.

PHOTOS:

1. **Attached pdf** includes story and a small selection of low-resolution photos for viewing on screen.
2. **DVIDS link** includes story and selected full-resolution, free downloadable images. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers.) <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/235156/alaska-national-guard-hosts-24-countries-pacific-environmental-security-forum>
3. **Flickr link** includes an event album with the complete selection of full-resolution, free downloadable images. (May not be accessible from all military computers.) <https://www.flickr.com/photos/alaskanationalguard/albums/72157680574361533/with/34561002666/>

Photo cutline:

The Alaska National Guard hosts the seventh-annual Pacific Environmental Security Forum in Anchorage, Alaska, May 9-12, 2017. PESF 2017, which was attended by more than 100 people from 24 countries, including Australia, Japan, Mongolia and South Korea, featured several themes: environmental security in a military context, climate change, water security, waster, energy biodiversity protection, and more. The 2017 PESF provided an open venue for militaries in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region to work with their civilian counterparts on enhancing environmental security, protection, and management in the region.



(U.S. Air National Guard photos by Staff Sgt. Daniel Bellerive)



(U.S. Army National Guard photos by 2nd Lt. Marisa Lindsay)



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