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Civil Support Team Conducts CBRN Training Alongside Federal, State, Local Agencies

Story by U.S. Army National Guard Sgt. Ian Withrow, 139th MPAD

FAIRBANKS, Alaska — Members of the 103rd Civil Support Team, based in Anchorage, Alaska, and part of the Alaska National Guard, alongside local, state, and federal partners ranging from the local Fairbanks Fire Department to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, participated in a joint training exercise February 24th and 25th, 2020 as part of Arctic Eagle 20. The exercise, which involved the participants responding to a simulated Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) 'all hazards' response call, began with a mid-morning raid carried out by the FBI and other law enforcement agencies.

Teams of gear-laden first responders from the Fairbanks Police Department, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Alaska State Troopers entered the target, a dilapidated building that had been converted into a chemical and biological agent lab by the scenario designers, and provided the initial contact and assessment of the scene. Upon determining that the incident they responded to (a hostage situation) was part of a larger and more hazardous scene, the various law enforcement agencies pulled back and brought in the Fairbanks Hazardous Materials Unit.

"Today our mission was to do an initial [reconnaissance] of the building to identify any hazards and materials inside," said Sean Heaney, a hazmat technician with the Fairbanks North Star Borough Hazmat Team and Fairbanks resident. "For us being a response team, but also a volunteer team, typically we'll arrive on scene after someone else has called us in."

The hazardous materials team provides an initial walkthrough and threat assessment when potential chemical, biological, or radiological dangers are encountered.

"We're prepared to deal with most any threat," Heaney said. "[But] The main types of incidents that we respond to, or would be prepared to train for, would be chemical incidents. An incident like this is a little bit more far-reaching, and usually requires the aid of military assistance."

When local teams determine the threat warrants it, they further elevate the site to the attention of the Civil Support Team, who immediately mobilize to take control of the situation.

"We are responding to an incident commander call for suspected hazmat related substances," said Sgt. Fabiana Kirtley, an Italian-born member of the Alaska National Guard's 103rd Civil Support Team out of Anchorage, Alaska.

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When a CST is called up by an incident commander, the team has one hour in which to respond and accept the mission. Shortly after activation an initial element heads out to set up a staging area, prepare equipment, and in most cases establish a decontamination line.

The teams hone their craft not only through relentless unit level training, but also by participating in large scale exercises like Exercise Arctic Eagle 20. Executing missions in differing climates and environments ensures their skills are up to any challenge. By combining harsh conditions with a widely varied assortment of participants, each of the groups involved develops the ability to quickly form cohesive, successful bonds with any given partner organization.

“We train at a section level on a weekly basis,” said Kirtley, who serves as a survey team member. “And at a unit level on a monthly basis. We recreate scenarios kind of like this one. We train to meet our standards and exceed them. We train to perfection.”

This site is one of seven training venues being utilized for Arctic Eagle 20, which is playing out across Alaska throughout the next several weeks. Arctic Eagle 20 provides a unique opportunity for participants, adding the complexities that come with conducting operations in an arctic environment to an already challenging and dynamic field. Agencies from across the country, the state, and the world are brought together to rehearse and train for a wide variety of dangerous situations, perfecting their skill sets in the blistering cold. As an arctic nation, this operation demonstrates a crucial capability to promote regional stability, and is a critical piece in improving interoperability and maintaining an arctic-ready force.

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For more information contact the Media Operations Center via phone (907) 459-8761 or e-mail arcticeaglemoc@gmail.com.

PHOTOS

1. **Flickr link** includes an Exercise Arctic Eagle 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/72157713253264612>
2. **DVIDS link** includes selected full-resolution photos. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers) <https://www.dvidshub.net/feature/ArcticEagle2020>



A Soldier assigned to the 103rd Civil Support Team scans unknown substances in a simulated biological and chemical lab for any hazards during Exercise Arctic Eagle 20 on Feb. 25, 2020. Arctic Eagle 20 provides the opportunity to work on community relationships with federal, state and local agencies. (U.S Army National Guard photo by Spc. Kierra Harris/Released)

-more photos, next page-



Members of the Fairbanks police force, alongside Alaskan State Troopers and federal partners listen to an after-action review after they breached a building for training purposes. Training such as Arctic Eagle 20 allows partnerships to work better together and better prepare for cold weather operations. (Photo by U.S Army National Guard Spc. Kierra Harris/Released)



A member of the Fairbanks North Star Borough scans a breached building for hazardous chemicals during Exercise Arctic Eagle 20. This exercise utilizes multiple agencies and partnerships to fuller explore and operate equipment in harsh temperatures such as Alaska during this field exercise on Feb. 24, 2020. (Photo by U.S Army National Guard Spc. Kierra Harris/Released).