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Innovators in cold-weather technology integrate with participants at Arctic Eagle 2020

Story by U.S. Air National Guard Senior Airman Shannon Chase, 168th Wing

FORT WAINWRIGHT, Alaska - Approximately 70 research and development experts traveled to Fairbanks, Alaska to participate in the Alaska National Guard's exercise Arctic Eagle 2020.

With over 600,000 square miles of diverse terrain and weather, Alaska, presents numerous challenges for military members and emergency responders. In the event of a natural disaster or emergency response, personnel must be trained and equipped to establish and sustain operations in arctic environments.

"I think the dynamic weather is a factor that makes Alaska special and challenging," Dr. Robyn Barbato, soil microbiologist with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Cold Regions Research and Engineering Laboratory, said. "Add the logistics to bring things places, it's wide open here, the terrain is very different."

Research and development experts from the Chemical Biological Incident Response Force, Indian Head, Maryland; Federal Emergency Management Agency, Headquarters, Task-Forces 8, of California and 1 of Nevada; Defense Threat Reduction Agency; Department of Health and Social Services; Research Institute of Environmental Medicine; U.S. Army Combat Capabilities Development Command, U.S. Army Alaska; International Personnel Protection; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers CRREL; Construction Engineering Research Laboratory; Canada TF-1; 39 Canadian Brigade Group; and 8th Homeland Response Force observed the CBRN Response Enterprise, Search and Extraction venue conducted at the Combined Arms Collective Training Facility on Fort Wainwright, Alaska during exercise Arctic Eagle 2020, Feb. 23 thru 25.

The bulk of the observers assessed how well current equipment and processes worked in cold weather environments, while others integrated new equipment and processes into the training environment to be tested and validated.

U.S. Army Maj. Adrien Humphreys, Chief of CBRN Operations for the Alaskan North American Aerospace Defense Command Region, explained the importance of inviting researchers and scientists to participate in the exercise.

"The benefit of having the observers is that they get to see the capabilities of what they've worked on and how Soldiers are using them," Humphreys said.

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One of the struggles faced by researchers is finding the opportunity to gain hands-on experience with the equipment and the people they are creating it for.

Barbato explained that her goal was to understand what military members are going through when working in the field.

“We wanted to know what Soldiers do and how [we can] tailor our research to real needs,” Barbato said. “Because we can dream up all these ideas, and we’re really good at generating ideas. But the opportunity to see a mission exercise, to engage with the military, is invaluable.”

Jared Sapp, a science advisor with the CCDC, explained how field exercises like Arctic Eagle 2020 provide unique opportunities to evaluate new technology and refine innovative ideas.

“These are some of the best venues to get equipment in the hands of our Soldiers, Marines, and Airmen,” Sapp said. “With exercise participants dedicated to support that exercise, you can find time to use equipment, to see how it functions, to get a first look at how technology might perform in the hands of a Soldier.”

The first phase of the search and extraction venue was designed to test newly developed dry decontamination procedures to confirm their effectiveness in cold weather environments.

Marine Cpl. Stephanie O'Brien from the CBIRF explained how the cold weather makes it impossible to follow normal procedures for decontamination.

“Typically, we use a whole lot of water,” O'Brien said. “But here in the Arctic that's not possible without causing unnecessary harm to our casualties and ourselves.”

Another challenge faced by CBRN teams is the decontamination of K-9s involved in search and rescue efforts.

“For this exercise we [conducted] dry DECON, which is a combination of vacuuming and wiping,” O'Brien said.

Although researchers and participants were presented with multiple challenges while working in Alaska's cold weather, that didn't dampen their spirits. Arctic Eagle 2020 provided an opportunity for professionals from multiple agencies and disciplines to come together and collaborate on how to best prepare our military and emergency responders to safely and effectively do their jobs in arctic conditions.

“The interactions with the different entities and having those one-on-one conversations, in addition to the other research observers, was fantastic,” Barbato said. “I really use the word invaluable because I can't put it into words the knowledge I've gained by observing the exercise.”

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For more information contact the Alaska National Guard Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs Office at (907) 428-6031 or mvapublicaffairs@alaska.gov.

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/>

2. DVIDS link to press release (Primary for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers)

<https://www.dvidshub.net/news/364589/innovators-cold-weather-technology-integrate-with-participants-arctic-eagle-2020>

3. DVIDS link to all selected full-resolution photos of Arctic Eagle 2020. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers) <https://www.dvidshub.net/feature/ArcticEagle2020>



Military and civilian professionals observe and evaluate the performance of search and extraction training at the Combined Arms Collective Training Facility, Fort Wainwright Alaska, Feb. 23 thru 25. This training was part of exercise Arctic Eagle 2020, a statewide exercise designed to evaluate cold weather capabilities. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Shannon Chace)

A Federal Emergency Management Agency search and rescue K9 team conducts a search and extraction training event in which they are tasked with finding and assisting hypothetical casualties in a scenario in which a helicopter crashed into a hotel during exercise Arctic Eagle 2020 on Fort Wainwright, Alaska, Feb. 24. This event is designed to train participating agencies to conduct sustained operations in extreme cold-weather conditions. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Grace Nechanicky)

