

MEDIA UPDATE: April 15

—**HEADLINES**— *Scroll down for full stories and links.*

| Alaska National Guard |

1. On Call and Always Ready: The Alaska Naval Militia

| Novel Coronavirus/COVID-19 in Alaska |

2. 8 new cases of COVID-19, 1 new death reported
3. Dunleavy plans to lift restrictions on elective health procedures in first step to reopen state economy
4. Anchorage Assembly votes to extend COVID-19 emergency declaration
5. Princess and Holland America cancel most of their Alaska cruises, won't open lodges this summer

| Novel Coronavirus/National Guard News |

6. National Guard COVID-19 Response

| Novel Coronavirus/COVID-19 National & World |

7. BBB: Stop sharing senior pictures on social media
8. The military's travel ban is getting an extension, SECDEF confirms

—ALASKA NATIONAL GUARD—

1. On Call and Always Ready: The Alaska Naval Militia

AKNG Courtesy Story/April 14

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — On March 24, 1989, a man-made disaster shocked the 49th state.

The Exxon Valdez oil tanker had run aground, spilling more than 10.8 million gallons of crude oil into Prince William Sound. More than 1,300 miles of coastline were slicked with the greasy substance affecting all manner of wildlife.

The ramifications would be felt for decades, but state officials rapidly mobilized a cleanup force with federal and private aid. To assemble the response required, the state needed skilled and disciplined manpower. It was for this reason that officials took the historic step of putting Alaska's Naval Militia on state active duty orders for the first time.

The Alaska Naval Militia was initially established in 1984 and comprises dedicated service members prepared to do their duty for country and state. In accordance with state law, all members of the Alaska Naval Militia are Reserve component service members of the United States Navy or Marine Corps.

Cmdr. Jennifer Avery, commanding officer of the Alaska Naval Militia, said she sees the advantage this can provide.

“What’s so important is that every member is trained up and ready to go,” she said. “The National Guard doesn’t have to spend money or time to train us. When the state needs us, we’re ready to deploy.”

Using well-trained Sailors and Marines for the state has been a valuable aspect of the Naval Militia since its inception. Retired Lt. Cmdr. David Allen took the oath a year after its formation and has firsthand knowledge on the difference a Naval Militia can make.

“The Sailors and Marines bring a lot of experience and capabilities for the governor to use in directly supporting the people of Alaska,” he said. “They’re a valid part of the response community that is very efficient and effective. The Naval Militia brings a lot of high-value personnel at a low cost to the state.”

Chief Electronics Technician Travis Morris, a Naval Militia member for more than ten years, recalls his experience during the Swan Lake fires last year.

“I had no idea just how much we would be utilized,” he said. “The very first day I was placed in charge ... I ensured everybody was conducting their relief duties in a safe and responsible manner.”

Morris said he believes working with state forces in reducing the fire’s damage showed the type of contribution the Naval Militia is capable of.

“I would say that we definitely have an impact on the success of an operation,” Morris said. “I think the fact that Alaska has a Naval Militia to turn to is a strength, especially when it comes to emergency response.”

With more than 30 years of experience, Allen has seen opportunities to deploy come in various forms, from forest fires, floods, and avalanches to community aid.

“It’s always an interesting experience,” he said. “The response is a state-wide, complex operation.”

Avery, Allen and Morris said they take pride in the Naval Militia’s ability to combine federal and state service.

“We’re Alaskans just like the public,” Avery said. “We desire to help in the state’s time of need.”

In 2020, the Alaska Naval Militia are called to action in response to the COVID-19 epidemic. As the public heeds Gov. Mike Dunleavy’s hunker-down order, Sailors and Marines of the naval militia join the National Guard in serving the very communities they call home.

“When the governor calls during a state of emergency, we’re ready,” Avery said. “The Alaska Naval Militia is willing to be put to work, wear our uniforms, be the professional service member and help our state and community.”

Chief Quartermaster Michael Dixon, who swore into the Naval Militia in 2012, supervises a unit of Sailors, bringing a variety of qualifications and certifications to the table.

“As Sailors, we have a lot of professional and in-rate knowledge,” the chief said. “From medical to security, we can pass on that knowledge and share with similar jobs in other branches of the military.”

Collaborating and working in tandem, the different branches can function more effectively in handling a state emergency as a joint force. Being part of the Alaska Naval Militia provides Sailors and Marines with the chance to directly contribute to their communities as military service members.

“I’m very happy to be taking the responsibility to serve not only my nation but my state,” Morris said. “Being a Naval Militia member, you have a very unique opportunity to serve both at the same time.

Link: <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/367392/call-and-always-ready-alaska-naval-militia>

— NOVEL CORONAVIRUS/COVID-19 IN ALASKA—

2. 8 new cases of COVID-19, 1 new death reported

KTVA by Jennifer Summers/April 14

The Department of Health and Social Services reported eight new positive cases of COVID-19 in Alaska on Tuesday, bringing the total number of cases in the state to 285.

There were no new reported cases in Fairbanks. There were four new cases reported in Anchorage. Girdwood, Wasilla, Juneau and Craig each reported one case.

DHSS also announced another COVID-19 related death in the state, bringing the total of deaths to nine.

The department said 98 people have recovered from the virus, an increase of 13 people from the day before. Hospitalizations remain at 32 cases.

Link: <https://www.ktva.com/story/42006802/8-new-cases-of-covid19-and-a-new-death-reported>

Related: <https://www.ktuu.com/content/news/State-wide-deaths-hit-9-total-eight-new-cases-announced--569633161.html>

3. Dunleavy plans to lift restrictions on elective health procedures in first step to reopen state economy

KTVA by Elizabeth Roman & Daniella Rivera/April 14

Gov. Mike Dunleavy said state officials are looking at ways to reopen the economy and want to begin with Alaska's health care system.

Health care and the economy

Conversations are ongoing about how to reopen different sectors of the economy.

Dunleavy said the state is working at reopening the health care sector first, after elective procedures were shut down to preserve personal protective equipment.

"We feel we're at the point now that we're getting a handle on the PPE and that's one reason why we're going to be opening up that sector and that's elective procedures," Dunleavy said.

Alaskans are being asked to continue to follow all other health mandates so they can monitor cases after reopening the health care sector.

"There's gonna be a risk in every single thing we do, because we don't yet have a vaccination and we don't have antivirals, so there'll be a risk to everything we do," Dunleavy said. "We figured that with the metrics that we can watch very carefully, we can fine tune this approach and in the end it would be better off that we begin the process of opening this sector up now, because it is health."

Dunleavy clarified that fishing, hunting and hiking is allowed as long as people practice social distancing.

When it comes to health mandates for food and beverage businesses, Dunleavy said one change soon to come is modifying what is able to be delivered.

Previously, businesses that sold wine and beer were unable to deliver those products. However, Dunleavy confirmed this is going to be changed in an effort to help those businesses.

He said he can't say whether Alaska has seen the worst of the virus, but he is hopeful.

Coronavirus in Alaska

There are 285 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Alaska. On Tuesday, eight new positives were announced.

These cases include four in Anchorage, one in Girdwood, one in Wasilla, one in Juneau and one in Craig.

Zink said four of the people who tested positive are men and four are women. Four of the patients are in their 20s, three are in their 30s and one is in their 40s.

Another person has died from the virus, bringing the total number of deaths counted in the state to nine.

Zink said the woman who died was from Wasilla. She was in her 30s and had underlying medical conditions.

"It's just a reminder of how underlying medical conditions can really put people at risk and that may be conditions because of treatment that someone is getting for other conditions, or it may be because of other underlying conditions they may have since birth," Zink said. "We do think about this disease in terms of the elderly, but I just really think about this family and send love and condolences to them in this time of loss."

Over 8,000 Alaskans have been tested for the virus. Zink said 3.4% of those tested have gotten positive results.

Thirty-two people have been hospitalized and at least 98 people have recovered, according to the state.

Dunleavy said 31 inmates have been tested for the COVID-19.

Seventeen of those inmates are in Anchorage, four are in the Mat-Su Pre-Trial Facility, four are in the Lemon Creek Correctional Center, three are in the Hiland Mountain Correctional Center, two are in the Fairbanks Correctional Center and one is in the Wildwood Correctional Complex.

To date, no inmates have tested positive for COVID-19. However, there have been at least six confirmed cases in staff members at LCCC after roughly 40 were tested.

Until there is a vaccine or treatment, Zink said COVID-19 is expected to continue to spread.

She previewed a new hospital report dashboard that will allow Alaskans to see up to date health care capacity information, including available hospital beds and ventilators.

Link: <https://www.ktva.com/story/42007817/watch-alaska-governor-gives-health-economic-update-amid-coronavirus-crisis>

Related: <https://www.ktuu.com/content/news/State-update-Alaska-coronavirus-cases-another-fatality--569646401.html>

4. Anchorage Assembly votes to extend COVID-19 emergency declaration

KTVA by Jennifer Summers & Megan Mazurek/April 14

The Anchorage Assembly unanimously approved a second extension for Mayor Ethan Berkowitz's civil emergency declaration on Tuesday. It allows the mayor to create orders to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

The emergency declaration, which was set to expire Tuesday night, has been extended through June 5. A resolution originally called for the extension to last through Nov. 15.

Some Assembly members said extending the emergency declaration until November would match the length given to Gov. Mike Dunleavy, giving the city the ability to respond in tandem.

However, others said the Assembly meets more regularly than the Legislature, arguing the emergency declaration should only be extended until June. The mayor said he supported the decision.

Several people in Anchorage called in to testify saying non-essential business can't survive several more weeks without any revenue.

Assembly members reminded everyone that just because the emergency declaration was extended doesn't mean the "hunker down" order will last until then.

"We do not anticipate to be in a hunker down mode for much longer," Berkowitz said. "It is going to take an ongoing effort. The pandemic will not disappear when the hunker down order disappears."

Many echoed the mayor's sentiments of reopening the city economy in phases.

Link: <https://www.ktva.com/story/42007297/anchorage-assembly-to-vote-on-extending-covid-19-emergency-declaration>

Related: <https://www.ktuu.com/content/news/Mayor-extends-modifies-hunker-down-order-to-May-5-emergency-powers-extended-to-June-5-569652231.html>

<https://www.alaskapublic.org/2020/04/15/anchorage-emergency-declaration-extended-to-june-some-measures-to-relax-in-coming-weeks/>

5. Princess and Holland America cancel most of their Alaska cruises, won't open lodges this summer

Alaska Public Media by Tegan Hanlon/April 14

Two cruise lines announced Tuesday that they're canceling most of their Alaska sailings this summer, and won't operate lodges and sightseeing buses in the state as they continue to wrestle with the coronavirus pandemic and its impacts.

The announcements serve another blow to Alaska's economy, and mean the loss of thousands of seasonal jobs.

"This global outbreak continues to challenge our world in unimaginable ways," said a statement from Jan Swartz, president of Princess Cruises, a global cruise and tour company.

Princess Cruises says it's canceling all of its 2020 Princess Alaska Gulf cruise and cruisetours for the season, and more widely extending its cancellation of all of its voyages worldwide through at least the end of June.

Swartz said it's not viable for the company to operate its five Alaska lodges, trains and buses given the shortened season.

"We deeply regret that we won't be able to employ the approximately 3,500 teammates who help show our guests the great land each summer," she said. "Our thoughts are also with all of our small business partners throughout Alaska who we've supported every summer for decades."

Princess Cruises operates lodges in Fairbanks, Cooper Landing, Copper Center and the Denali area.

“We know these decisions will have a large adverse economic impact on the state of Alaska which relies on tourism,” Swartz said.

Swartz said the company remains optimistic that its Emerald Princess and Ruby Princess ships will be able to offer round-trip cruises from Seattle to Southeast Alaska in the late summer. It will re-evaluate those plans in the weeks ahead.

The cruise line had announced in March that it was pausing all of its operations for at least two months. It says it’s offering guests credit or refunds.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention renewed its no-sail order for cruise ships last week, and is recommending Americans defer cruise ship travel because passengers are at an increased risk of person-to-person spread of diseases, including COVID-19.

Holland America Line also announced Tuesday that its suspending all of its global operations and sailings through at least the end of June, citing continued port closures and travel restrictions stemming from the pandemic.

It’s canceling its Alaska cruises on five ships for the summer: the Maasdam, Noordam, Oosterdam, Volendam and Westerdam. It also canceled land excursions in the state for the season, and says it will not operate The McKinley Chalet Resort, McKinley Explorer rail cars and tour buses this summer.

“These are unprecedented times,” Orlando Ashford, president of Holland America Line, said in a statement. “Having to delay summer cruising and cancel our land tours for the entire season is the responsible thing to do, yet also very disappointing and a first in our more than 70 years of taking guests to Alaska.”

The cruise line operates at least two other ships, the Eurodam and Koningsdam, with online itineraries to sail to Southeast Alaska later in the season, in August or September.

Ashford said the company looks “forward to better days and returning to a full summer cruising season in 2021.”

Link: <https://www.alaskapublic.org/2020/04/14/princess-cancels-cruises-wont-operate-its-alaska-lodges-buses-and-trains-this-summer/>

— NOVEL CORONAVIRUS/COVID-19 NATIONAL GUARD NEWS—

6. National Guard COVID-19 Response

The National Guard/April 15

Connecticut Guard & Uruguay share best practices; New York Guard members build test kits; Florida Guard medics answer call at test sites; Maryland Guard supports nursing homes; Nevada Guard commits 800 members; and Innovation drives COVID-19 fight at Detroit care center!

Latest news articles: <https://www.nationalguard.mil/coronavirus/>

— NOVEL CORONAVIRUS/COVID-19 NATIONAL & WORLD—

7. BBB: Stop sharing senior pictures on social media

KTUU/April 15

CINCINNATI (FOX19) - The Better Business Bureau (BBB) is advising against sharing senior photos on social media.

According to the BBB, scammers or hackers who surf through social media sites will see these #ClassOf2020 posts, and will now have the name of your high school and graduation year, which are common online security questions.

“All it takes is an internet search to reveal more information about you, such as family members, your real name, birthdate or even where you live,” the BBB warned.

BBB has the following tips to keep you safe on social media:

Resist the temptation to play along - While it’s fun to see other’s posts, if you are uncomfortable participating, it is best to not do it.

Review your security settings - Check your security settings on all social media platforms to see what you are sharing and with whom you are sharing.

Change security questions/settings - If you are nervous about something you shared possibly opening you up to fraud, review and change your security settings for banking and other websites.

Link: <https://www.ktuu.com/content/news/BBB-Stop-sharing-senior-pictures-on-social-media-569657591.html>

8. The military’s travel ban is getting an extension, SECDEF confirms

Military Times by Meghann Myers/April 14

A 60-day ban on all non-essential domestic and international Defense Department travel is going to be extended, Defense Secretary Mark Esper confirmed to reporters Tuesday.

The Pentagon’s senior leadership is working on the final details of a modified stop-movement order, he said, with an announcement being prepped for later this week.

“While I understand the impact this has on our troops and their families this is a necessary measure to keep our people safe and our military ready to act,” Esper said.

While the travel ban has halted deployments, permanent change-of-station moves, training and temporary duty for schooling, officials have stressed it has been necessary to stop the spread of coronavirus throughout the force and throughout the communities with which troops interact.

That has included canceled deployments, extended deployments and hundreds of families stuck in limbo as they prepared to move duty stations — sometimes having sent their families and household goods ahead, then spending the last month on their own without their belongings.

There are exceptions written into the policy, including for hardships, such as a family member with special needs, at the discretion of local commanders.

“We want to make sure we have a more comprehensive way in which we address exemptions,” Esper said.

Though the initial ban came down March 12 and was initially to last until May 12, the Pentagon has been reviewing the environment every 15 days.

“The important thing is as this virus unfolds and as our mitigation measures take place and as testing happens, etc., this is something that I committed ... we will be reviewing this,” Esper said.

And testing, senior officials said, will play a role in the decisions made about restoring training and operations to normal.

As of Tuesday morning, the Defense Department had reported 4,769 total COVID-19 cases, including more than 2,600 in troops.

But it has not so far been DoD policy to do widespread testing of asymptomatic troops, even in units with a confirmed case.

“We want to make sure we devote those finite resources to the highest priority,” Thomas McCaffery, the deputy assistant defense secretary for health affairs told Military Times on Friday.

More than half of the Navy’s 950 cases are assigned to the aircraft carrier Theodore Roosevelt, diagnosed because ship-wide testing following an outbreak that sidelined the flattop in Guam last week.

Esper acknowledged that more than 300 of the roughly 600 positive tests on the ship came from asymptomatic sailors, and that the understanding of asymptomatic carriers is figuring into the Pentagon’s next moves.

The Navy began imposing a 14-day quarantine period on ships preparing to get underway and ships returning home in March. Now, that policy includes pre-deployment testing for some vessels, Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told Military Times.

Of particular interest is the nuclear submarine fleet, as well as Air Force nuclear bombers and tier 1 counter-terrorism units, as well as on-call rapid deployment units who have days’ warning to deploy in case of an emergency.

“Our desire, our aspiration is to expand testing, especially for groups that are probably going to be in tighter quarters — subs, bomber crews, basic trainees,” Milley said.

While DoD labs can test about 9,000 samples a day, he said, the objective is to get to 60,000 a day in the next six weeks or so.

Basic training is also of particular interest, Esper said.

Currently, the services have put a two-week freeze on bringing in new recruits, but that gap of thousands of new troops will have long-term effects for units who have been expecting them.

They would be one of the populations to get 100-percent testing, Esper said.

“... for me, basic trainees coming into the system into the pipeline, the ability to test them is important for future readiness,” he said.

Link: <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2020/04/14/the-militarys-travel-ban-is-getting-an-extension-secdef-confirms/>

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