

TOPOFF 2 Another Opportunity to Train

Press Release

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PETERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Colo. – Without warning, the public address system in the U.S. Northern Commands (USNORTHCOM) headquarters building blared, "This is an exercise. The Department of Homeland Security reports a suspected radiological dispersal device (RDD) explosion south of downtown Seattle at 1900Z. USNORTHCOM personnel should prepare to report to operations centers."

With this announcement, people at United States Northern Command launched into the most comprehensive terrorism response exercise ever undertaken in the United States – Top Officials 2, or TOPOFF 2.

Since the commands activation in October 2002, USNORTHCOM has participated in numerous exercises to educate, train and exercise the headquarters staff and component commands and to serve as platforms to enhance the essential relationships across the broad range of government agencies involved in homeland security.

"TOPOFF 2 is not a USNORTHCOM–sponsored exercise, but we are actively participating just as we would for a real–world event," said Col. Gene Pino, USMC, Director of Training and Exercises for USNORTHCOM. "Any exercise opportunity for such a new command is a great training opportunity, as today's exercises lay the foundation for tomorrow's operational successes."

TOPOFF 2 is sponsored by the U.S. Departments of Homeland Security and State, and is designed to provide training for top federal, state and local responders, and demonstrate coordinated national crisis and consequence management capabilities in response to a weapons of mass destruction event.

According to Pino, military support of civil crisis and consequence management activities generally falls into two categories: areas where DOD has a unique military capability; and times when a catastrophic event overwhelms the ability of civil authorities to respond alone.

"USNORTHCOM's role in domestic contingencies is to support the lead federal agency responding to a particular incident, and we are using TOPOFF2 as an opportunity to exercise our readiness and capability to provide that support," Pino said.

USNORTHCOM is participating in the exercise with a headquarters battle staff, component command response cells and limited deployment of coordinating officials to other governmental operations centers.

"Participation in TOPOFF 2 allows the command to continue to exercise and train as it builds towards full operational capability," said Pino, "so that we can effectively function as part of the multi–layered local, state and federal and military effort to protect our nation."

USNORTHCOM's structure, which includes a headquarters staff and joint task forces, gives the Department of Defense the means to effectively apportion its joint forces to not only support its commitments overseas but to respond to an incident at home.