

Northern Command Tests Homeland Defense, Civil Assistance Capabilities

Press Release

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PETERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Colo. U.S. Northern Command's capability of responding to multiple, simultaneous homeland defense and federal relief events will be put to the test Aug. 18-28 during Exercise Determined Promise.



The multi-level exercise, which takes place primarily in Clark County, Nev., and Colorado Springs, tests the Department of Defense's ability to support civil and federal authorities in a coordinated response to a biological hazard, as well as other manmade and natural crises.

Determined Promise 03 is a validation exercise for the Department of Defense's newest combatant command, according to Marine Col. Gene Pino, U.S. Northern Command director of training and exercises.

Colonel Gene Pino, Determined Promise 03 Exercise Director, provides a background briefing to Colorado based media representatives on Aug 15. The briefing took place in the Northern Command Headquarters on Peterson AFB, Colo.

Photo credit: Master Sergeant Carl Legore, U.S. Army

"This is a validation exercise for us to tell (Air Force Gen. Ralph E. "Ed" Eberhart, commander, U.S. Northern Command) we've evolved to the point in our concept of operations for him to look the Secretary of Defense in the face and say (USNORTHCOM) is fully operational capable," he said.

Nearly 2,000 people will participate from 15 federal offices and agencies, seven state and local organizations in Nevada, and 28 military units across the United States.

"To make it truly effective, we must exercise exactly how we intend to operate," Pino said.

In addition, the exercise allows Clark County and the State of Nevada to ensure they are providing citizens with the best planning for their protection, while demonstrating that local, state, and federal officials are prepared to coordinate an effective response.

The Exercise Determined Promise 03 scenario includes a simulated hurricane, multiple simulated homeland defense events, wild land fires, and a simulated pneumonic plague outbreak in Clark County.

The exercise begins with officials from local, state and federal agencies uniting in Nevada. County and state officials will activate their emergency operations centers, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Region IX will deploy personnel and equipment to Clark County. Finally, at the request of the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Defense will join the integrated federal response in Clark County with personnel and equipment to assist in the public health emergency.

One such organization USNORTHCOM will call upon is the Joint Task Force Civil Support headquartered at Fort Monroe, Va.

"They eat drink and sleep the CBRNE (biological, radiological, nuclear and high yield

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explosives) threat," Pino noted.

Additionally, the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) will conduct a one-day, live-fly exercise in Alaska as part of a continuous exercise program to test NORAD's ability to deal with potential airborne terrorist threats and interface with USNORTHCOM.

While some may think an exercise like Determine Promise 03 could provide potential terrorists with ideas for future attacks, Pino believes the exact opposite is true.

"I believe the scope of this exercise, its magnitude and choreography, serves as a tremendous form of deterrence."

USNORTHCOM plans to prove it is fully operational by the end of Determine Promise 03, but the training won't stop there. The command has already planned a minimum of two major exercises each year through 2008 to hone its skills and continue to build interagency relationships throughout the nation.

"We will not only be attempting to reach every Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) region, but also engage major states and cities through our area of responsibility and build scenarios against each of the (CBRNE elements)," Pino noted.

The Department of Defense established U.S. Northern Command in 2002 to consolidate under a single unified command existing missions that were previously executed by other military organizations.

The command's mission is two-fold: homeland defense and civil support. Specifically, USNORTHCOM conducts operations to deter, prevent, and defeat threats and aggression aimed at the United States, its territories, and interests within the assigned area of responsibility. Additionally, as directed by the President or Secretary of Defense, the command provides military assistance to civil authorities including consequence management operations.

U.S. Northern Command plans, organizes, and executes homeland defense and civil support missions, but has few permanently assigned forces. The command will be assigned forces whenever necessary to execute missions as ordered by the President. Approximately 500 civil service employees and uniformed personnel representing all service branches provide this essential unity of command from U.S. Northern Command's headquarters at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado Springs.