



Recent State Militia Emergency and Disaster Deployments 2017-2018

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Introduction

During the past two years a number of state governors activated state militias to assist in emergency and disaster operations. This report records such call ups in Alaska, California, Georgia, New York, Texas and Virginia as examples of how contemporary state militias can be deployed and as analysis of their value.

State militias, also known as state guards, state defense forces or state military reserves, are organized and controlled by state governments with the encouragement of the federal government. The volunteers in the forces train without pay but are paid when called to active duty by the governor. They are primarily trained to assist in emergencies and disaster events. They are available to fill a role in state and national security if called upon.

Organizational structures, uniforms and ranks are similar to those in the U.S. military and national guards. There may be infantry, air, naval, marine, chaplain, medical or other units depending on individual state force structures. Brigade, regiment, battalion, company or other units are designed as cadres capable of expanding their ranks with civilian volunteers led by trained officers and NCOs. They are considered to be National Guard reserves. They cannot be federalized.

All states have constitutional and legislative authority to activate a state militia but some states have chosen not to do so.

A brief summary of the organizational structure of each of the following state militias is included in this report along with their recent deployment activity.

Alaska State Defense Force

The Alaska State Defense Force has a long and commendable history in responding to call ups during fires, floods, landslides and other emergencies.

The mission is to maintain an organized and trained military force capable of timely and effective response to state emergencies.

Its table of organization consists of one brigade headquarters and two regional battalions composed of companies and specialized detachments.

One unit is a signal company. That specialization was put to timely and effective use during an historic first out-of-state deployment of ASDF militiamen.

A detachment was activated to travel to Puerto Rico following hurricane Maria damage in 2017. There they supported Alaska Army and Air National Guard members operating a joint incident site communications capability system. The system bridges the communication gap between military and civilian agencies by providing shared non-secured Department of Defense and civilian network communication capabilities.

California State Military Reserve

California's militia, the California State Military Reserve, proved their value in supporting wild fire emergency operations.

The military reserve was formed to supply the state with an organized and trained volunteer military force capable of being activated to augment the National Guard in the event of a state security or natural disaster event, or when the National Guard is deployed.

The organizational structure includes a headquarters with its headquarters detachments and with a number of commands, brigades, support groups and detachments. Most units are directly embedded and under the operational control of National Guard units.

The 2017 Thomas fire proved that the California militia was an organized and trained military force capable of being activated to augment the National Guard.

One week after the start of the Thomas fire, and other wild fires, the governor activated force. Members of a number of commands and support groups quickly deployed to the Santa Barbara Emergency Operations Center. There they assisted the coordination of National Guard military police units to take over the traffic control points for the evacuation areas. Other militia personnel were sent to support the National Guard's response to the southern wildfires.

In southern California they helped manage the Los Alamitos staging area, manned gates, conducted traffic control points and patrolled the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services staging area.

Georgia State Defense Force

The Georgia militia answered the call to duty in response to Hurricane Irma in 2017.

The mission of Georgia's state defense force is to provide an organized, trained, disciplined rapid response volunteer force to assist state and local government agencies and civil relief organizations during emergencies to insure the welfare and safety of Georgia citizens.

It is composed of a headquarters and three brigades with geographic areas of responsibilities along with some specialized units.

Georgia militiamen were active throughout the state in various support roles to insure the welfare and safety of citizens from Hurricane Irma's damage. A contingent demonstrated ability to rapidly deploy to assist civil relief organizations. They were assigned to assist American Red Cross volunteers at a high school used as a shelter.

After it became safe for evacuees to return home, the mission changed to assisting the transportation of residents back to their communities. This part of the mission included a range of activities from bus loading management to food and water distribution to carrying baggage.

New York Guard

It was 2017 Hurricane Maria's devastation of Puerto Rico that led to the call up of New York Guard soldiers.

The New York Guard, also known as the New York State Military Reserve, is one of the largest state militias in the country. Its mission includes augmentation, assistance and support of the Army National Guard and Air National Guard, and to aid civil authorities. The Guard has a long and impressive deployment history including action during Super Storm Sandy.

It is comprised of a headquarters commanding three brigades. Each brigade serves a region within the state and has specialized units. Logistics is a specialty of some units.

Logistics training and experience were put to good use when New York militiamen were called into action to augment and assist National Guard Units, in an operation named Task Force Donation Warehouse Ops, to manage the donation of relief supplies destined for Puerto Rico. The supplies, such as bottled water, flashlights, batteries, diapers and baby diapers, were accepted at collection points throughout the state. The state guard personnel worked around the clock in three shifts alongside national guardsmen, managing the consolidation, warehousing and transport of the supplies.

Texas State Guard

The Texas State Guard has a long and impressive track record when called upon to assist in fire, flood, winter storm and other emergencies.

The Guard assists and augments Texas military and civil authorities in times of state emergencies, and in on-going support of National Guard units and local communities.

It consists of six civil affairs regiments, two air wings, a medical brigade and a maritime regiment.

The ability to effectively assist military and civil authorities was proven during a recent flood emergency. Militia volunteers provided support to the Texas Disaster District Coordinators, Texas Department of Public Safety and the Air National Guard. They performed numerous tasks to support disaster coordination work including administrative duties, answering phones, monitoring social media and updating information on the Texas Web Emergency Operations Center.

Virginia Defense Force

Virginia's militia can trace its heritage back to assisting trench and fortification construction at the Revolutionary War decisive Yorktown battle of September 1781. In September 2018 the Virginia Defense Force was called to active duty to assist the Virginia National Guard in the state-wide battle against the destruction of Hurricane Florence.

The mission is to: provide for a trained organized reserve militia to assume control National Guard facilities after mobilization of the National Guard; assist in mobilization of the National Guard; and provide a military force to respond to the call of the Governor in the event of disasters or emergencies

It is organized into a headquarters, two active regiments and a reserve regiment.

The Virginia militia proved itself to be a versatile military force capable of responding to the call of the governor. In responding to the Florence call up it supplied multiple capabilities including interoperable communications, operations center augmentation, operations center liaison, incident management assistance, shelter logistics, mission tracking and public information.

Observations

Recent successful operations of state militias validate the decisions of states to maintain these cost effective volunteer reserve forces. They have been called to action in response to a variety of emergencies and disasters.

State militias can support and assist military or civil disaster responders with a spectrum of capabilities including communication, logistic, shelter, incident command, transportation, patrol, food and water distribution, administration, public information, donation collection, traffic control, security, medical, data management and other functions.

Effectiveness of the militias in these five studies was demonstrably evidenced by: timely response to governor call up, training, preparation, organizational structure, chain of command, uniforms that give comfort and confidence to disaster victims, common recognizable rank insignias, easily integration into both military forces and civil authority operations and commitment of their members to service in time of emergency or disaster.

Sources

Information for this report was obtained from the web sites of the following:

State Guard Association of the United States

Defense Visual Information Distribution Service

New York State Guard

Virginia National Guard

Texas State Guard

Georgia State Defense Force

California State Military Reserve

Wikipedia

Comments are welcomed. The author can be contacted through the Applied Government Studies Center at Charles@agscenter.org.