Responding to Armageddon:

The National Guard Bureau Weapons of Mass Destruction Civil Support Teams

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On 9 September 2003, the government issued a warning that terrorists could employ chemical or biological weapons to attack civilian targets within the continental United States. At the time, we had already experienced examples of domestic weapons of mass destruction (WMD), such as the Oklahoma City bombing, the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks, and the anthrax-contaminated mail.[1] Fortunately, the Department of Defense (DOD) established within the National Guard (NG) a unique unit organized and trained to provide domestic consequence management support for WMD incidents within the United States, its territories and possessions, the District of Columbia, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.[2] These 32 WMD civil support teams (CSTs) operate under the command and control of the state governors (and their equivalents in Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia) through their respective adjutants general. The National Guard Bureau (NGB) works closely with the U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) to ensure the standardization of the periodic CST external evaluations and has developed a Response Management Plan that places specific CSTs on a higher alert status for possible deployment to states that do not have a CST or that require backup from one or more additional CSTs. Understanding the skills of the WMD-CSTs, their organization and equipment, and how such teams are providing assistance throughout the country enhances our capability to respond quickly, effectively, and appropriately if disaster should threaten locally.

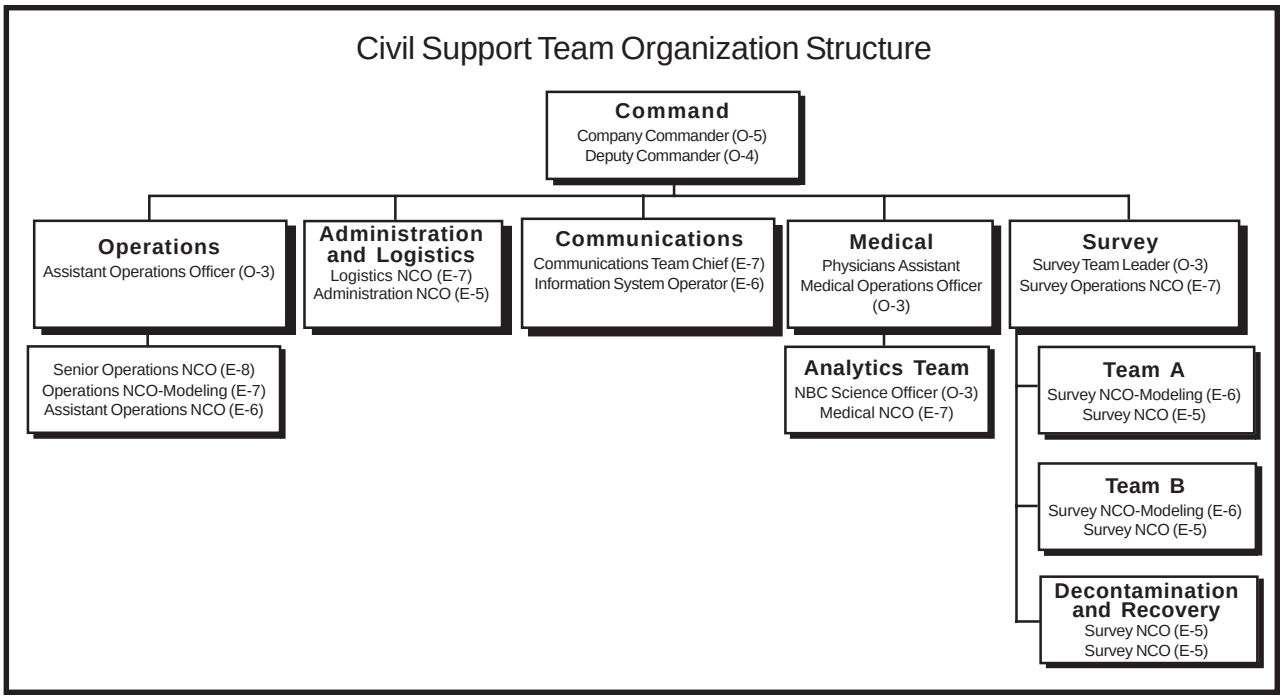
Background

The events of 11 September 2001 required the government to refine the way it operates in response to security challenges within the United States and its territories. This new mission is homeland security (HLS)—an overarching concept that includes all actions taken at the federal, state, local, private, and individual citizen levels to deter, defend against, or mitigate attacks within the United States, or to respond to other major domestic emergencies. One key aspect of HLS is homeland defense (HLD), which focuses on actions taken by DOD, non-DOD, and non-federal agencies to deter or defend against a foreign attack. Another aspect of HLS is civil-support operations. These are operations where DOD may be called upon to provide support within the United States to deal with either the consequences of a foreign attack or for emergency and law enforcement purposes. The NG has historically performed these types of missions, and it has been quick to adapt its organizations to deal with the sophistication of the threats and operational environments of the 21st century.

Mission and Organization

The WMD-CST mission is domestic consequence management support. This is support provided to local, state, and federal government agencies to manage a WMD incident in the United States, with emphasis on preparing for, responding to, and recovering from the potentially catastrophic effects of terrorist-employed WMD.

The unit is jointly staffed with 22 full-time Army and Air National Guard members and a lieutenant colonel as their commander. The unit members hold 14 military occupational specialties and are being trained and equipped to provide a technical reachback capability to call on other experts. The unit is federally resourced, trained, equipped, and sustained, with state NG units providing the personnel, stationing, and common support. A team consists of six sections—command, operations, communications, administration and logistics, medical, and survey (see chart on page 21). Each team is formed specifically to provide



advice to the incident commander to help make assessments for requirements for follow-on forces.

Training and Equipment

The WMD-CST members participate in both military and emergency first-responder training. Team members acquire approximately 600 hours of initial training above their military occupational specialty qualifications or professional military education requirements. DOD schools provide instruction in areas such as chemical and nuclear weapons, medical care, and the spread of infectious diseases. Other agencies—such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Department of Justice, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Department of Energy—also provide training. In addition to individual soldier training, more than a year of collective (unit) training is required before operational certification of a team is achieved. Following certification, the soldiers, individually, and the teams, collectively, continue to train in multiple-threat environments (hazardous material [HAZMAT] accidents and deliberate or accidental chemical or biological contamination sites) on a year-round basis to maintain proficiency.

WMD-CSTs are equipped to operate in areas containing unknown contamination. For this reason, they are required to maintain personal protective equipment sets that exceed those provided to military field forces. WMD-CSTs are also equipped with high-end detection and analytical equipment required to detect and identify a greater range of substances, including toxic industrial chemicals, organic substances, and chemical and biological warfare agents.[3] Approximately 33 percent of CST equipment is standard issue, while 67 percent is unique to support specialized mission requirements. The unit possesses satellite, secure, and cellular telephone communications to provide connectivity to civil and military forces.

Preparation

A WMD-CST combats terrorist activity on a regional basis by preparing for and responding to the increased threat presented by WMD.[4] Under the auspices of U.S. Code Title 10, *Armed Forces,* or U.S. Code Title 32, *National Guard*, a WMD-CST rapidly deploys to a suspected or actual terrorist attack or other WMD incident. Upon arrival, it conducts special reconnaissance activities focused on WMD in order to assess the effects of the incident or attack and provide situational understanding to command channels. Members of the WMD-CST interact with other federal and non-federal agencies to provide comprehensive technical and consultative services to local authorities on managing the effects of the incident and to minimize the impact on the civilian populace. Finally, the WMD-CST assists with follow-on emergency and military support, deploying to execute validated requests for assistance by civil authorities. The WMD-CST is intended to be a reinforcing capability, not to replace functions normally performed by the emergency first-responder community.

Conclusion

The unique capabilities of WMD-CSTs have made them an integral part of all recent high-visibility operations, including events like the

World Series, the Olympic games, the Super Bowl, and Mardi Gras. Since the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, WMD-CSTs have responded to more than four hundred incidents. About one-third of these responses have been to test powders suspected to be anthrax or to examine suspicious pieces of mail, unknown liquids, or other substances. Requests for assistance have come from a number of state emergency management agencies, state and local law enforcement agencies, hospitals, and health departments; national aid agencies like the Red Cross; and numerous federal agencies, including the Drug Enforcement Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Homeland Security, the U.S. Postal Service, and the U.S. Secret Service.

Each WMD-CST is expected to implement personnel recall procedures and maintain a 4-hour timeline level of readiness to respond to state adjutant general-validated requests for assistance. Emergency first responders, incident command system personnel, and WMD-CST members themselves should always remember that prior coordination facilitates the integration of WMD-CST capabilities and significantly improves actual response timelines. Planning, scheduling, and accomplishing such coordination across the breadth of a WMD-CST geographic region of coverage can be a major undertaking in itself, but this activity must be accomplished if we are to be truly prepared for the day when the warning of attack is replaced by the reality of an attack.

Endnotes

[1] DOD defines WMD as high-explosive or nuclear, biological, chemical, and radiological weapons that are capable of a high order of destruction and/or of being used in such a manner as to destroy large numbers of people.

[2] For additional information about the formation of the WMD-CST program, see "Chapter 2: The Response" at *<http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/acsc/01-200.pdf>*.

[3]This equipment may include gas chromatograph or mass selective, flame ionization, dual-wavelength flame photometric, pulse flame photometric, and halogen selective detectors. The van-mounted laboratory, also outfitted with a roof-mounted air conditioner or heater, instrument benches, and gas cylinder storage, is self-sustaining with an internal 7-kilowatt diesel generator and compressed gases supplied by gas generators.

[4] WMD-CSTs are currently based in Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California (2) , Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia.

References

Field Manual 3-11.4, *Multiservice Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical (NBC) Protection.* 2 June 2003

U.S. Code Title 10, *Armed Forces*

U.S. Code Title 32, *National Guard*