

**Military Support to
Civilian Authorities in Emergency Response Operations
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Personal Experience in Civilian/Military Interface in Emergency Response

Early in a 20 year career as a commissioned Sheriff's Deputy I was assigned as the department's Search & Rescue Manager. Over a span of eleven years I managed about 1,200 wilderness SAR missions in Arizona and in the Republic of Mexico. My success in this role was dependent upon the ability to mobilize resources suitable to the mission. Many of these resources were military assets to include National Guard and Reserve air and ground assets.

I found an abundance of military assets to support SAR missions. These include Air Force, Army, and Marine resources including National Guard and Reserve units. In a world of abundance, my responsibility was to manage a combination of civilian and military assets that were the most effective, safe, and efficient.

Later in my law enforcement career, I worked Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) and was the beneficiary of excellent tactical training from Air Force and Army, National Guard and Reserve ground and aviation units.

For the past twelve years I've managed the Operations Section for the Arizona Department of Emergency & Military Affairs, Division of Emergency Management. Much of my work involves the coordination of state assets in response to disasters. This includes ongoing interaction with the Arizona Army National Guard's (AZARNG) Plans & Operations Military Support Officer (POMSO). Currently, the State of Arizona averages about one Presidential Major Disaster Declaration per year. The most recent have been either floods or wildland fire events. The AZNG is a frequent player in these disasters.

It's All About Relationships

Although there are notable exceptions, most civilian emergency response authorities work infrequently with military assets. Consequently, more effort is required to develop effective working relationships. While civilian emergency responders hold their military counterparts in high regard, they may have unreasonable expectations of what the military can provide. Expectations on response times, capability, availability, and cost effectiveness are not well understood.

In my view, military assets are underutilized in civilian emergency response. I suggest this lack of exercise in small and moderate scale events leads to reduced effectiveness in large-scale and catastrophic incidents. Success is a function of practice. It's also a function of practice with critical partners in a multi-agency emergency response team. We are good at what we do on a routine basis. Effective civilian/military interaction on

small scale operations contributes to effective transition into larger scale operations. A golden rule is: “Let’s not meet for the first time in the midst of a crisis.”

How Do We Fix This?

Pre-mission networking, training, and ongoing response to civil emergencies are central to our success. With a commitment to these fundamentals, issues such as communications compatibilities and incident organization are worked out well before the critical stages of large-scale, complex, disaster response.

The professional emergency response manager has the responsibility to mobilize the most effective, practical, and cost effective assets to achieve the public safety mission. To achieve this goal, the manager should have developed a comprehensive “tool box” of assets. As masters of their trade, the best managers select the precise combination of tools to solve a problem. In my assessment, most managers develop a limited variety of tools and frequently leave out key military assets.

It’s a lot like a bunch of neighborhood kids getting together for an impromptu game of sandlot baseball. Kids want to play with their best buddies. Fundamentally, it’s not much different in the professional world of multi-agency response to emergencies. We like to work with those that we’ve networked with and have confidence with throughout our careers.

Our National Guard and Reserve units need to become a central component of the civilian emergency response community. The interaction may begin at the basic training levels and continue throughout a public safety career’s in-service training.

Ongoing training is an important first step. Furthermore, live mission interaction is required to be truly effective as a cohesive team. These missions do not need to be large scale disasters. They may be on a smaller scale such as wilderness SAR missions. Clearly, interaction on small scale missions lends itself to strong performance on moderate to large scale events. To achieve this will require a commitment in both the civilian and military commands.

Currently, Arizona’s National Guard assets are heavily multi-tasked with commitments overseas and US/Mexico border security missions. While the overseas missions take resources out of our state the border security missions contribute to an effective civilian/military interface on the home front.

In conclusion, I’ve experienced successful interface with military assets on front-line SAR through state level disaster missions. This success was developed through reasonable efforts to develop working relationships. It’s an achievable task. The same relationships need to be developed at the national level between players such as FEMA and their national level military counterparts.