

Dept. of Military Affairs: REMINDER: National Guard to canvass Omro as part of Dark Sky exercise

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by Capt. Joe Trovato

MADISON — Approximately 110 Wisconsin Army National Guard Soldiers will partner with local emergency management, fire and police from the city of Omro, Winnebago County and the American Red Cross to go door-to-door in Omro, Wisconsin, May 16 as part of a full-scale training exercise known as Dark Sky.

Local residents can expect to see Soldiers canvassing neighborhoods, knocking on doors, speaking with residents, and passing out emergency preparedness information as part of the exercise during the afternoon hours of May 16. Residents may participate in a voluntary survey about smoke detectors. The American Red Cross will dispatch volunteers to help resolve smoke detector issues. Residents who are not home during the canvassing period will still receive emergency preparedness information at their doors, and they may still choose to participate in the survey by calling “2-1-1.”

There is no threat to the public, and local residents should not be alarmed or concerned if they see an increased law enforcement or military presence in Omro May 16. The purpose of this exercise is to aid in readiness and safety should a major crisis arise in the city.

In the exercise scenario, National Guard Soldiers — at the request of local authorities and emergency responders — will simulate conducting health and

welfare checks of local populations to ensure residents are safe. This is similar to a real-life scenario that played out in July 2017 in Burlington, when Wisconsin National Guard Soldiers assisted local emergency responders by going door-to-door in that community to conduct health and welfare checks in the wake of extreme flooding there.

“The city of Omro is pleased to be partnering with Winnebago County and the State of Wisconsin to exercise our ability to incorporate mutual aid resources into local disaster operations” Linda Kutchenriter, the Omro city administrator, said. “This opportunity will help our first responders, as well as those around the state, learn how to better coordinate and communicate with the Wisconsin National Guard, American Red Cross, and other partners to conduct critical public outreach during these crisis periods.”

Dark Sky is a full-scale exercise that runs May 15-17 in Brown, Calumet, Dane, Fond du Lac, Milwaukee, Outagamie and Winnebago Counties. The exercise simulates a long-term mass power outage across a large swath of Wisconsin, testing the abilities of private utilities, nongovernmental organizations, emergency responders from all levels of government, and the National Guard to respond to threats to the power grid, a long-term power outage and its second and third order effects.

The goal of the exercise is to increase the understanding of the coordination, policies, and procedures required to conduct a joint inter-agency response to cyber and physical threats to critical Wisconsin infrastructure.

The state Emergency Operations Center, the Business Emergency Operations Center, Wisconsin National Guard, county emergency operations centers, municipal command posts, and federal agencies will participate in the exercise.

The Dark Sky scenario includes a variety of incidents that require local, county and state-level response operations designed to exercise each participating unit and agency. The Wisconsin National Guard will exercise its joint staff and the National Guard Reaction Force in support of private utilities partners, nongovernmental organizations, local, county, state and federal agencies for infrastructure security. As part of the exercise, Wisconsin National Guard Soldiers will conduct door-to-door health and welfare checks in Omro.

The exercise will also test the abilities of public and private sector partners to work directly with local citizens impacted by critical infrastructure failures and to

coordinate critical fuel distribution, cyber response, intelligence sharing, and other resources as well as procedures for opening and operating the state's Business Emergency Operations Center.

The exercise represents the final phase in a series of related exercises that culminate in Dark Sky. In November 2017, the Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs and private utilities partners conducted GridEx in Columbia and Dane Counties. GridEx also simulated a cyber and physical threat to the power grid resulting in a Wisconsin National Guard response. In February, the annual Statewide Interoperable Mobile Communications — or SIMCOM — exercise simulated a notional winter ice emergency that affected 600,000 people and disconnected power to about 50,000 people.

The relationships developed between the Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs and private utilities in Wisconsin during the previous exercises have further honed public-private response capabilities and laid the groundwork for continued success in the Dark Sky exercise.