

Gov. Walker: Black Hawks heading to North Carolina to aid in Hurricane Florence relief

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MADISON – Wisconsin Army National Guard aviators are actively conducting relief operations in support of civil authorities in North Carolina as the state grapples with the fallout of Hurricane Florence.

Governor Scott Walker authorized Wisconsin's support after North Carolina requested two UH-60s as well as 12 crew and support staff from the Wisconsin National Guard – approximately half of the contingent of Soldiers that departed from Wisconsin Sept. 14 – via an Emergency Management Assistance Compact – or EMAC, request.

One aircraft embarked on a swift water rescue mission while the other conducted a patient transport mission. Two additional aircraft and 12 crew remain in Maryland in a standby status ready to respond to any additional requests for assistance.

“We want to make sure our fellow Americans have the help and aid they need from our state as they recover from Hurricane Florence,” said Governor Walker.

Four UH-60 Black Hawk medevac helicopters and approximately 24 crew and support staff based in West Bend, Wisconsin departed the Badger State Sept. 14 in a training status that simultaneously pre-positioned them in the region in the event that states affected by Florence needed their assistance. The troops now serving in North Carolina in a state active duty status will receive specific missions from civil authorities there. The medevac unit brings an array of capabilities to the response,

including medical treatment and transport as well as hoist capabilities that can pull individuals from areas cut off by high water.

The Department of Defense said more than 7,000 National Guard and active component troops are on duty in the region and ready to assist as needed.

Walker cleared the way for Wisconsin National Guard support to states affected by the hurricane when he issued Executive Order 308 Sept. 14, which authorizes Wisconsin's adjutant general, Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, to call elements of the Wisconsin National Guard to state active duty to assist civil authorities in response to EMAC requests. The emergency declaration also allows permanent state employees who are certified Red Cross disaster relief volunteers to take a leave of absence up to 30 days to provide specialized disaster services in North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia, and it suspends certain restrictions and limitations to help carriers transport vital emergency relief supplies more efficiently.

The Wisconsin National Guard stands ready to assist civil authorities with other requests for assistance, as needed, and Wisconsin Emergency Management continues to monitor the situation and review requests to determine if there are other areas in which Wisconsin can provide support.

Serving in times of emergency is one of the National Guard's core missions, and thousands of National Guard troops are on duty assisting civil authorities in states affected by Hurricane Florence. In fall 2017, thousands of National Guard troops mobilized in support of Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Approximately 650 Soldiers from the 32nd "Red Arrow" Infantry Brigade Combat Team supported civil authorities in Florida last fall where they provided humanitarian relief, security, and traffic control support to communities. Black Hawk medevac crews also deployed to the U.S. Virgin Islands last fall to transport patients in need of medical care to health care facilities, and Airmen from the Wisconsin Air National Guard deployed to Puerto Rico to assist in re-establishing communications on the island and provide mass feeding capabilities to first responders and civilians.

The Wisconsin Guard has also been busy assisting civil authorities here in Wisconsin. Hundreds of Guardsmen assisted with sandbagging efforts after torrential rains soaked southern Wisconsin in late August and early September, and Soldiers responded on multiple occasions to flooding in summer 2017 in Monroe County and Burlington, Wisconsin.

A West Bend-based crew also recently pulled two stranded kayakers to safety from a marsh near Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and in the summer of 2016, they also rescued a member of the Bad River Reservation in need of kidney dialysis when extreme flooding cut off the reservation from land routes.

The Wisconsin National Guard simultaneously continues to maintain a high operational tempo with worldwide deployments in support of its federal mission as the primary combat reserve of the Army and Air Force. More than 350 Soldiers from the Milwaukee-based 1st Battalion, 121st Field Artillery deployed to the Middle East this summer and more than 25 Soldiers from the 157th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade's Military Engagement Team deployed to the Middle East in March. Meanwhile, a team of Soldiers from the 112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment deployed to U.S. Naval Station Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in March to provide public affairs support there. Nearly 30 Soldiers from the West Bend-based 248th General Aviation Support Battalion recently returned from a deployment to the Middle East. Wisconsin Army National Guard aviators from Detachment 5, 641st Aviation returned from Afghanistan earlier this summer, and approximately 85 Soldiers with 1st Battalion, 147th Aviation returned from a nine-month deployment to the Middle East in January. Another 35 Soldiers from West Bend's Company C, 1st Battalion, 168th Aviation returned from a nine-month deployment to Afghanistan in November.

Also in November, approximately 270 Airmen from the 115th Fighter Wing returned to Madison from a deployment to Korea, and more than 100 Airmen from the 128th Air Control Squadron at Volk Field returned from Southwest Asia. Approximately 70 Airmen from the 128th Air Refueling Wing in Milwaukee are in the midst of deployments worldwide, and other Airmen from the 128th deployed earlier in the fall as well.