

Dept. of Military Affairs: Fighting rumors and misinformation about the Wisconsin National Guard's role in the COVID-19 response

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There are many rumors swirling around our great state about the Wisconsin National Guard mobilizing to enforce statewide quarantines, or quarantines in specific cities. Some rumors have reported seeing Guard troops staging vehicles and equipment at public locations in the Milwaukee area. Other rumors suggest a military-enforced shutdown of healthcare facilities or other critical infrastructure. These rumors are patently false.

Some have also reported seeing large trainloads of military vehicles moving through Wisconsin claiming the Guard is moving vehicles into place to enforce quarantines. Again, these rumors are patently false. These are not Wisconsin National Guard vehicles or trainloads, and sightings of military vehicles on train cars are a common site in Wisconsin, where large manufacturers produce military vehicles and ship them to military units around the country on a regular basis, or where units training at our state's military installations sometimes rail load equipment to and from Wisconsin for exercises and regularly scheduled training events. These regular movements have nothing to do with COVID-19 or the state's response to it.

Here are the facts when it comes to your Wisconsin National Guard and the response to COVID-19.

Approximately 350 Wisconsin National Guard troops – your neighbors and our Citizen Soldiers and Airmen – mobilized to state active duty in March, so we are in a good position and ready to support the state in a timely and efficient manner, with

anything it might request. These Soldiers and Airmen are reporting to their assigned armories in our local communities.

The National Guard always serves in a support role to state or civil authorities. Serving our state and fellow citizens during an emergency is one of the National Guard's core missions.

Many of the 350 troops currently serving on state active duty are medics or medical professionals, while others are planners, logistics experts, and command and control elements that we've brought on to ensure we have the people we need in place to best support our state and you, the people of Wisconsin.

So far, 30 of our troops have assisted the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) transport a group of Wisconsin citizens back to their homes after they returned to our state from a cruise ship that had confirmed cases of COVID-19 onboard.

A still to be determined number of Wisconsin National Guard personnel will serve as poll workers at polling locations around the state for the April 7 election. The Wisconsin National Guard received a request to use its personnel as poll workers due to an extreme shortage of volunteers across the state and is working closely with state elections officials to determine how many Guard members will be needed. The Citizen Soldiers and Airmen assigned to the polls will serve in their home counties, in accordance with state law.

We've also created a small liaison team to work with the Wisconsin Elections Commission to offer advice, logistics support, and project management expertise to help ensure the state can hold the election in a safe, sanitary manner. The Guard is already preparing to procure and distribute necessary sanitary supplies to polling sites such as hand sanitizer, wipes, and spray bottles to ensure those sites are safe for the public.

In addition, members of the National Guard are on duty supporting DHS and conducting warehouse operations where they've helped move critical personal protective equipment (PPE) as well as receive and repackage PPE for distribution to sites around the state.

A team of six Wisconsin National Guard medics also augmented the staff at a senior living facility in Grafton, Wisconsin, for three days in March while the facility dealt

with a staffing shortfall after a COVID-19 outbreak there.

Guard personnel are also assisting DHS and local health departments in Milwaukee and Madison with staffing at voluntary self-isolation facilities. Approximately 10-20 personnel are assigned to each of three different locations in those communities to provide administrative support and medical monitoring at each site for individuals who would otherwise be unable to effectively self-isolate.

We continue to work closely with our partners across state government to anticipate needs and potential resource requests. We've discussed the possibility, if needed, of assisting the Wisconsin Department of Health Services with specimen collection for COVID-19 testing, logistics support such as moving critical supplies or tests around the state, transportation missions, and augmenting health care facilities with some of our medical personnel, if needed.

We have NOT discussed enforcing statewide quarantines, shutting down interstate highways, nor any of the other baseless rumors that are circulating.

Unfortunately, there are nefarious actors - in some cases, from other countries - operating in the shadows and intentionally circulating false information and misinformation via social media. We understand that these rumors are part of a concerted disinformation campaign aimed at creating hysteria and panic in our nation's communities.

Trust that we will share the latest information about our mission with the public. We will provide regular updates on the status of our Soldiers and Airmen as well as any additional missions they receive. You can always find the latest official information on our Facebook page, or on our website at www.dma.wi.gov.

Our Citizen Soldiers and Airmen are your neighbors. We live and work in the same communities as you. Most of us hold civilian jobs as bankers, small business owners, nurses, teachers, plumbers, electricians, and more in your communities, and we are all working together with the rest of our state government, and you, to manage our state's response to COVID-19.

We are ready, and we're here to lend a helping hand, wherever the state needs us. We appreciate your support.