

WI National Guard: Former team member returns to take command of Wisconsin Guard's 54th Civil Support Team

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MADISON, Wis. — A former operations officer and deputy commander has taken command of the Wisconsin National Guard's 54th Civil Support Team (CST), a full-time 22-member response team for emergencies or terrorist events involving weapons of mass destruction, toxic industrial chemicals or natural disasters.

The unit, consisting of Army and Air National Guard members, is designed to rapidly deploy, assist local first-responders in determining the nature of an attack or hazardous materials scenario, and provide medical, communications, technical support and advice.

"I couldn't have imagined a better way to reunite with the team than to come back as our commander," said Lt. Col. Seth Kaste during a formal change of command ceremony Oct. 7 at the Armed Forces Reserve Center in Madison.

Kaste spent seven years with the 54th CST before serving as the commander of the Wisconsin Army National Guard's Recruiting and Retention Battalion, a post he relinquished earlier that day.

"You bring a wealth of knowledge," Col. Jade Beehler, commander of the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 64th Troop Command, said during the ceremony. "I have no doubt you'll take the baton and run and do good things in this unit."

Kaste follows Lt. Col. Matthew Kelly, who served with the 54th CST for the past

three years as deputy commander and then commander. Kelly now assumes the duties of administrative officer and rear detachment commander for the 157th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade. The 157th headquarters element and the brigade's 357th Signal Company recently mobilized to deploy to the Horn of Africa.

Beehler thanked Kelly for his leadership with the 54th CST.

"You have provided valuable leadership in building a cohesive team and accomplishing all your missions," Beehler said. "You take with you valuable skills developed here in leading the 54th. I have no doubt that you will have an immediate impact on the Soldiers of the 157th."

Kelly acknowledged that taking command of the 54th CST was "daunting," and listed the unit's roster of former commanders to explain — Col. Eric Leckel, who now leads the 157th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade; Brig. Gen. David May, now Wisconsin's deputy adjutant general for Air; and Brig. Gen. Timothy Covington, now Wisconsin's deputy adjutant general for Civil Support.

"How am I going to live up to that legacy?" Kelly recalled thinking when he took command of the 54th CST. "I didn't think — I don't think — I was of the same caliber as these fine leaders."

Kaste politely disagreed.

"Thank you for this opportunity to lead one of the finest organizations in the state and the very best civil support team in the country," Kaste said to Wisconsin National Guard leaders at the ceremony. "I appreciate your trust in me, and will work hard every day to continue the strong tradition and legacy that Lt. Col. Kelly and his predecessors have set in place."

Kelly said he would miss his teammates and their mission.

"In my time on the team, I've been amazed at your dedication, your competence, tenacity, ingenuity and passion," Kelly said. "We get to train and execute our directed mission every single day. We get to build relationships in the community and partnerships with our local state and federal first responders.

"We have accomplished a lot of great things together and we carried on that legacy of excellence," Kelly continued. "I eagerly anticipate hearing the news of your continued success and excellence under Lt. Col. Kaste.

Kaste also praised the members of the 54th CST.

“The personalities and constant drive of all the team members are two of the many reasons this team has been so successful in the past and will continue to be successful in the future,” Kaste said. “The men and women of the 54th Civil Support Team are all leaders in their own way. They have proven to be the best of the best. They are experts in their field, and willing to share their knowledge — always approachable. These characteristics are what make leading this team the pinnacle of my career, and something I truly cherish.

“I look forward to all the challenges ahead.”