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Dual-status commanders appointed

By Tech. Sgt. Erich B. Smith and Sgt. 1st Class Jon Soucy | National Guard Bureau | March 26, 2020

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Members of the New York Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry Regiment, hold up directional signs for drivers leaving the drive-through COVID-19 Mobile Testing Center located at the South Beach Behavioral Center in Staten Island, New York. New York is one of eight states where a dual-status commander has been appointed. **(Photo by Maj. Patrick Cordova)**

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ARLINGTON, Va. – Dual-status commanders have been appointed in eight states, with 10 more awaiting approval, as the National Guard continues to support COVID-19 response efforts throughout the country.

The states where dual-status commanders have been appointed are California, Colorado, Massachusetts, Maryland, New York, Oklahoma, South Carolina and Washington.

A dual-status commander is typically appointed in large, complex stateside missions or response efforts involving both Guard members in state, or Title 32, status and other service members in federal, or Title 10 status.

The dual-status commander has command authority over both elements and is simultaneously a member of the state chain of command, subject to the orders of the governor and adjutant general, as well as the

the state chain of command – subject to the orders of the governor and adjutant general – as well as the federal chain of command, and the orders of the president and secretary of defense.

"The role of the dual-status commander is that he works for two different principals through two different chains of command," said Army Maj. Gen. Giselle Wilz, head of the National Guard Bureau's strategic plans and policy directorate, in a 2018 panel discussion on hurricane response.

Appointment of a dual-status commander – who is typically a general officer – allows for a smoother, more flexible approach to response efforts involving military members.

"Ultimately, his role is to facilitate the unity of state and federal forces in achieving dominance of justice in disaster response," said Wilz.

Appointment of a dual-status commander as part of COVID-19 – or other response efforts – does not, however, signal a change in the Guard's status or a move to implementing martial law or forced quarantining.

"I'm hearing unfounded rumors about National Guard troops supporting a nationwide quarantine," said Air Force Maj. Gen. Joseph Lengyel, chief of the National Guard Bureau. "Let me be clear: There has been no such discussion."

Instead, rather than having entirely separate state and federal chains of command, the dual-status commander acts as both – relaying federal orders to those on federal status and state orders to Guard elements in state status.

That streamlines response efforts, such as assisting state and local health officials, delivering food and medical supplies and staffing mobile screening sites, said Guard officials, referring to COVID-19 response efforts.

Dual-status commanders can be drawn from either the Guard or the active component Army or Air Force, but those appointed must have completed the dual-status commanders' course and other specialized training and certification, said Guard officials.

While serving in that capacity, dual-status commanders are jointly managed by the chief of the NGB and, depending on geographic region, either the commander of U.S. Northern Command or the commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command.

In the event of a multistate disaster or national event requiring a dual-status commander – such as COVID-19 response efforts – separate dual-status commanders would be appointed in each affected state in order to adhere to applicable state laws, said Guard officials.

Additionally, both the president and the state governor must agree to the establishment of a dual-status commander.

A dual-status commander was first implemented for the G-8 Economic Summit in June 2004. Army Brig. Gen. Terry Nesbitt, with the Georgia National Guard, commanded more than 4,800 Soldiers and Airmen, including 317 National Guard members from other states and approximately 2,400 Title 10 personnel.

Since then, dual-status commanders have been implemented in response to numerous major hurricanes, wildfires and flooding.

Almost 11,400 Guard members are currently supporting COVID-19 response efforts in all 50 states, three territories and the District of Columbia.

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