

# Guard concludes bird flu decontamination mission

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LAKE MILLS — Wisconsin Army National Guard members who have been assisting with decontamination of large vehicles and equipment at a Jefferson County site affected by bird flu have concluded nearly a month of work.

The 14 soldiers were called to active duty to support the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection's effort to combat the spread of the H5N2 avian flu virus that has affected hundreds of thousands of chickens and turkeys across the state.

The response team arrived in Lake Mills April 20 to begin conducting decontamination operations and remained on site until May 15, when their services were no longer required.

The H5 avian influenza virus first was detected in Wisconsin at a commercial chicken flock in Jefferson County on April 13, and two more county sites shortly thereafter. State officials said that as of Friday, the "depopulation" is completed at all three facilities and compost monitoring, cleaning and disinfection are under way at all of them.

The National Guard personnel originally assisted with the response to the first virus detection in Jefferson County, helping clean and disinfect large vehicles and equipment leaving the site.

Elements of the Guard's Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, High Explosive (CBRNE) Enhanced Response Force Package, or CERFP, were responsible for decontaminating vehicles and equipment at an affected facility near Lake Mills. Civilian vehicles and farm equipment moved in and out of the facility on a daily basis as part of the cleanup, and CERFP Soldiers from the Hartford-based 457th Chemical Company decontaminated all vehicles coming from the designated hot zone before allowing them to travel back into the community.

The team used military-grade pressure washers to spray vehicles and equipment leaving the poultry farm with water heated to 175 degrees Fahrenheit to remove any gross contaminants and begin the process of killing the virus. It also employed a disinfecting agent — Virkon — which kills the H5N2 virus on contact.

Wearing chemical suits and using a boom to keep contaminated water from running into the surrounding farm fields, the soldiers worked top-to-bottom and front-to-back at 45-degree angles on each vehicle and sprayed the



## ON THE JOB

ON THE JOB — Wisconsin Army National Guard soldiers who were part of a 14-soldier Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, High-explosive Enhanced Response Force Package team were called to state active duty to assist the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection in its response to avian flu outbreak at a site in Lake Mills. Soldiers from the Hartford-based 457th Chemical Company decontaminated every vehicle that came out of the designated hot zone before allowing it to travel back into the community. — Photos by Capt. Joe Trovato

bed of each dump truck after they delivered their loads at the farm, Sgt. Parminder Singh, a chemical specialist with the 457th, explained. Before entering the “hot zone,” each vehicle had to check in, turn off fans and air circulating units and tape and seal windows and doors.

When they returned to the decontamination area, Singh and fellow Wisconsin Army National Guard Soldiers such as Spc. Lacy Taylor, sprayed and disinfected the vehicles before allowing them to leave.

“This right here is basically your average 74D (chemical specialist) training,” Taylor said of the unit’s mission in Lake Mills. “You wash vehicles. You have a warm zone, a hot zone, a cold zone to decontaminate. A lot of it is just working together with people and just having a system of what to do.”

Taylor said that when she joined the military as a chemical specialist, she feared she would receive advanced training, but then never be asked to employ her skills outside of that. Having the opportunity to conduct a real-world chemical mission was a rewarding one, she said.

Sgt. Chad Rynders, who enlisted into the 457th when the unit was established in 2007, agreed.

“This is the first time we’ve actually been called onto a mission to do something and actually perform,” he said. “It just shows what we’re actually capable of.”

Rynders pointed out the National Guard’s ability to scale its response to the needs of the state or domestic agencies it supports.

“It doesn’t have to be mass personnel,” he said. “It doesn’t have to be a big attack of some sort. We can even respond to the smallest incident and still be able to assist and complete the mission.”

In a chemical environment, whether as large as a train derailment or terrorist attack, or a smaller scale response, the Guard can tailor its force package to respond, he said.

Sgt. Cody Cantley, a soldier with the 641st Troop Command Battalion, noted the same.

“I think it says a lot about the National Guard being able to respond to this mission as soon as they called us,” Cantley said. “It helped reinforce that the CERFP is something that is needed, and they’re not wasting money on us or time. This is something that they can actually rely on — that they can call on us and we’ll be there with the right equipment and the right amount of people.”

From a unit perspective, he said, the experience of conducting a real-world mission on which public health relied, will only help reinforce the importance of the unit’s mission.

“Now this will really help remind our soldiers that real things could happen and we could be called up at any time,” Cantley said. “This will help re-ignite that flame that, ‘we need to do this. We need to do it right, and we need to be the best at it.’”

Knowing that their work served and protected their fellow Wisconsinites was even more rewarding, he said.

“It was an honor to partner with DATCP to fill a critical need for the State of Wisconsin as it continues to battle the spread of the H5N2 virus,” said Maj. Gen. Donald Dunbar, Wisconsin’s adjutant general. “Once again, the Wisconsin National Guard proved its versatility and that it was up to the task and ready to respond to our state’s

needs.”

At the time of the original avian flu outbreak, DATCP officials established two zones around any outbreak site: 3-kilometer quarantine zone and 3- to 10-kilometer radius that was under surveillance. To follow the same protocols in Minnesota, where the virus has been infecting turkey operations, the quarantine zone now extends in a 10-kilometer radius from the location of any infected site.

The 10 Wisconsin flocks affected by the virus totaled 1,765,008 birds, which includes 1,112,970 chickens and 652,005 turkeys. All of the sites in Jefferson County involved chickens.

Gov. Scott Walker declared a state of emergency on April 20 and authorized the Wisconsin National Guard to assist authorities responding to the bird flu in Jefferson, Chippewa, Juneau and Barron counties. Jefferson County followed up with its own declaration of a state of emergency on April 24.