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Tennessee National Guard partners with local agencies for disaster response exercise

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – The Tennessee Military Department hosted the state-wide, multiagency emergency response exercise, Tennessee Maneuvers, May 15-19, to further enhance the state’s ability to collectively respond and operate in the event of any disaster.

“Disaster exercises are the best to improve our disaster response readiness,” said Lt. Col. Dallas Clements, Tennessee National Guard’s Deputy Director of Military Support. “Our goal is to make these events as realistic and complex as possible to better train our personnel.”

Tennessee Maneuvers is an annual, multiagency emergency response exercise that takes place in multiple counties across the state. Depending on the scenario, the counties involved differ each year. This year, the exercise took place in Bradley, Coffee, Davidson, Gibson, Hamilton, Hawkins, Knox, Loudon, Madison, Maury, McMinn, Rhea, Rutherford, Sullivan, and Wilson County.

“Emergencies and disasters can happen anywhere, so it’s important to train with different agencies and counties within the state to further streamline our joint capabilities in emergency situations,” said Capt. Autumn Hester, the exercise planner for Tennessee Maneuvers 24.

The scenario, severe flooding in Southeast Tennessee, exercised the joint response capabilities between the Tennessee National Guard, Tennessee Emergency Management Agency, Tennessee State Guard, Nashville Fire Department, Tennessee Valley Authority, as well as multiple county EMAs, fire departments, and police departments. The simulated widespread flooding served as a catalyst leading to multiple situations requiring search and rescue operations, critical site security, communication interoperability, and infrastructure failure response. Each agency participating in the exercise provided a unique and critical role essential for responding to these dynamic situations.

“The Tennessee National Guard is always a support agency to civil authorities when it comes to disaster response and recovery,” said Clements. “With that in mind, we need exercises like this to build and sustain those relationships with interagency partners as well as help us build capabilities.”

As part of this year’s Tennessee Maneuvers, and for the first time, the Tennessee Army and Air National Guard showcased their joint capabilities during a refueling mission. In this exercise scenario, a UH-60 Blackhawk in Southeast Tennessee required additional fuel to continue their search and rescue mission. A C-17 Globemaster III from the 164th Airlift Wing received fuel via aerial refueling from a KC-135 Stratotanker from the 134th Air Refueling Wing. The C-17 then transported the fuel to the simulated austere location of the UH-60 Blackhawk. Together, the Soldiers and Airmen then refueled the Blackhawk, enabling the crew to continue their mission.



“This portion of Tennessee Maneuvers allowed us to demonstrate our ability to transport large amounts of fuel very quickly to disaster-stricken regions,” said Clements. “TEMA, Arnold Engineering Development Center, and the Tennessee Bureau of investigations helped us accomplish this portion of the exercise.”

The exercise incorporated other military equipment that aids in disaster response situations, including the Light Medium Tactical Vehicle, which can carry up to 15 people and has a high ground clearance and the M60 Armored Vehicle Launched Bridge, which can deploy a 60-foot scissor-type bridge over obstacles. In one of the exercise scenarios, the 190th Engineer Company employed a M60 to build a temporary bridge, enabling lanes of passage for vehicle traffic in flooded areas.

“Both of these capabilities allow the Tennessee National Guard to assist local agencies with providing safer transportation for those in affected areas,” said Hester.

Additionally, along the Tennessee River in Hamilton County, the Helicopter Aquatic Rescue Team, comprised of a specialized crew with Tennessee Army National Guard’s 1-230th Assault Helicopter Battalion and the Nashville Fire Department’s specialized rescue divers to exercise their water rescue capabilities. The 45th Civil Support Team also supported this exercise, simulating boat rescues in flooded areas.

“Nashville Fire Department and the Tennessee Highway Patrol are key components to this type of mission and Hamilton County Emergency Management Agency helped make this part of the exercise a success,” said Clements.

Planning is currently underway for the next Tennessee Maneuvers, which is expected take place in May 2025.