

South Dakota National Guard

Public Affairs Office

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Gov. Dugaard activates SD National Guard members to help with Puerto Rico hurricane recovery efforts

PIERRE, S.D. – Gov. Dennis Dugaard has activated four members of the South Dakota Army National Guard's Company A, 139th Brigade Support Battalion, at the request of Puerto Rico government authorities to help with recovery operations in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria.

The Soldiers from the Watertown-based unit will provide water distribution capabilities to those in need.

They will deploy to Puerto Rico with two Load Handling System vehicles and trailers equipped with four Compatible Water Tank Racks, or "Hippos." The Hippos has the capability to receive, store and distribute up to 2,000 gallons of potable water per system.

"When disaster strikes, South Dakota lends a hand," Dugaard said. "Our thoughts and prayers continue to be with Puerto Rico and with the Soldiers of Company A, who will be on the ground helping those in need."

Recovery efforts are especially personal for one SDNG Soldier. Spc. Jorge Morales, a water treatment specialist in Company A, is from Ceiba, Puerto Rico.

While Morales now lives in Clark, his family is still in Puerto Rico and like the rest of the island, they've been impacted.

"I didn't think twice – I just said I'll go," Morales said, when presented with the opportunity to mobilize to Puerto Rico. "It's more than an honor. To help my people is something big."

This is the first request South Dakota has received through the emergency compact to help with hurricane recovery efforts.

Dugaard said the request for South Dakota National Guard support came through an Emergency Management Assistance Compact that exists between all 50 states and three U.S. territories. Under the compact, the State of South Dakota will be reimbursed for costs incurred during the mission.

The four Soldiers and equipment were airlifted to Puerto Rico Oct. 8 and could be deployed for up to 45 days.

While Morales isn't sure where in Puerto Rico the mission will take the South Dakota Soldiers or if he will even see family members, he said, "I'm going to help everyone like they are my family."

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170930-F-LY635-1290: U.S. Army Spc. Jorge Morales, Company A, 139th Brigade Support Battalion, South Dakota Army National Guard water treatment specialist, waves the Puerto Rican flag from his window, Sept. 30, 2017, on Grand Forks Air Force Base, N.D. Morales, born and raised in Puerto Rico, is part of a SDARNG unit deploying to his homeland to assist in hurricane relief effort. (U.S Air Force photo by Senior Airman Ryan Sparks)



170930-F-LY635-1113: U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Edwin Johnson, 319th Logistics Readiness Squadron cargo movements NCO-in-charge, spots a vehicle, Sept. 30, 2017, on Grand Forks Air Force Base, N.D. Members of the South Dakota Army National Guard drove to Grand Forks AFB and were assisted by the 319 LRS before deploying to Puerto Rico in support of the hurricane relief effort. (U.S Air Force photo by Senior Airman Ryan Sparks)



170930-F-LY635-1152: Grand Forks Air Force Base Airmen and members of the South Dakota Army National Guard discuss their plan of action, Sept. 30, 2017, on Grand Forks Air Force Base, N.D. The Airmen and Soldiers worked together to prepare cargo before the members of the South Dakota Army National Guard deployed in support of the hurricane relief efforts in Puerto Rico. (U.S Air Force photo by Senior Airman Ryan Sparks)



170930-F-LY635-1170: U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Ruben Zamora, 319th Logistics Readiness Squadron cargo movement section chief, left, and U. S. Army Master Sgt. Scott Bull, South Dakota Army National Guard, Company A, 139th Brigade Support Battalion operations NCO-in-charge, direct a forklift, Sept. 30, 2017, on Grand Forks AFB, N.D. The 319 LRS handled cargo for the SDARNG before they deployed to assist in the hurricane relief efforts in Puerto Rico. (U.S Air Force photo by Senior Airman Ryan Sparks)

FOR MORE INFORMATION, please contact the SDNG Public Affairs Office at (605) 737-6721 or e-mail ng.sd.sdarng.list.pao@mail.mil