

South Dakota National Guard

Public Affairs Office

Phone: 605-737-6721 Email: ng.sd.sdarng.list.pao@mail.mil Web: sd.ng.mil



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Employer support integral to SD National Guard mission

RAPID CITY, S.D. – Civilian employers of National Guard members provide an integral level of support to the South Dakota National Guard mission. Employers add to a strong national defense through leadership practices and personnel policies that support employees serving in the National Guard.

Businesses and organizations support the readiness of their National Guard employees by providing time off work, schedule flexibility, and other assistance, in order for them to complete their monthly and annual trainings periods, or when activated in support of domestic operations and wartime missions.

“Employers provide a pivotal role in their support to the National Guard and their Guard member employees,” said Maj. Gen. Jeff Marlette, SDNG adjutant general. “Without their support, it would make it more difficult for our service members to be ready when they are called upon.”

Of the SDNG’s more than 4,200 members, over 3,100 of them serve on a part-time basis while pursuing a civilian career or higher education goals.

“The majority of Guard members are part-time soldiers and airmen who have fulltime civilian jobs and careers,” said Jim White, state chair for the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve of South Dakota. “The support of employers whose employees are away for military training or deployments add to the success of the National Guard preparing for and accomplishing its missions.”

This employer supports provides National Guard member with the peace of mind and flexibility they need to leave their civilians jobs to prepare and focus on their military training and job duties or when activated for a state or federal mission.

Just last year, the SDNG deployed 490 service members in support of federal deployments to more than a dozen counties worldwide. The SDNG also activated nearly 400 soldiers and airmen for state response to the COVID-19 pandemic, providing over 35,000 man-days of support, and over 200 provided support to wildland fire, search and rescue, and civil unrest events.

“The SDNG provided a historic level of support to the state and nation in 2020, and employers equally provided a tremendous level of support,” said Marlette. “Our employers had to adjust having their employees deployed for extended periods of time away from their business. We cannot appreciate and thank them enough for their sacrifices.”

Service members’ knowing they still have their job to return home to adds to their peace of mind and sense of security, allowing them to focus on this mission.

“Being deployed away from their family, home and job can often create a sense of anxiety and worry for service members – wondering if everything is going to be okay while they are away,” said Capt. Chad Carlson, ESGR-SD program director. “The support and reassurance employers provide to their employees, knowing they will still have a job to return to, helps to ease any concerns.”

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Employers also add to that peace of mind by ensuring their employees receive re-employment rights or any additional pay, benefits, or promotions they would otherwise be granted or eligible for while away serving their state and country.

The relationship between employers and their service members is vital to a successful partnership, and communication and understanding is key. Service members need to ensure they provide advance notice to their employers about upcoming military training or pending deployments, and if deployed, both need to understand what their employment and re-employment rights are by law.

To ensure effective relationships exist between employers and the National Guard and their employees, the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve is there to help. ESGR is the lead U.S. Defense Department program promoting cooperation and understanding between civilian employers and their National Guard and Reserve employees.

“ESGR facilitates and promotes a cooperative culture of employer support for National Guard and Reserve service by developing and advocating mutually beneficial initiatives, recognizing outstanding employer support, increasing awareness of applicable laws and policies, resolving potential conflicts, and acting as the employers’ principal advocate within the Department of Defense,” said Carlson.

Through ESGR, the level of South Dakota employer support has been recognized throughout the state and nation. Over the last 15 years, more than a dozen South Dakota businesses and organizations have been nominated nationally for the Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award, with five receiving the award. The Freedom Award is the highest recognition given by the U.S. Government to employers for their outstanding support of their employees who serve in the National Guard and Reserve.

“Recognizing employers for their support and contributions of their service members strengthens our nation’s military,” said White. “Fostering the relationship between employers and the soldiers and airmen who work for them is vitally important, and employers understanding what they do and how their employees fit into that equation, is critical to their success.”

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200901-Z-A3566-0001: Sanford Health of South Dakota was one of 15 recipients nationwide who received the 2020 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award in recognition of the organization’s exemplary support for its National Guard and Reserve employees. Over the last 15 years, more than a dozen businesses and organizations from South Dakota have been nominated for the Freedom Award, with five receiving the award.