



by Rick Chersicla

You're in garrison, and you get the Warning Order (WARNO) for the Battalion (or Brigade) to deploy for a real world mission. Your organization, however, is not preparing to deploy overseas, or for an Emergency Deployment Readiness Exercise (EDRE), but is instead preparing to deploy and support civil authorities within the United States.

The odds are that very few—or perhaps none—of the personnel in your organization has conducted [Defense Support of Civil Authorities \(DSCA\)](#) operations. You and your leadership may find yourselves asking “what is DSCA?” on the eve of an operation, and more importantly “how can we prepare for it?”

Defense Support of Civil Authorities (DSCA) is support provided by federal military forces (and DoD civilians, DoD contract personnel, and National Guard forces in a Title 32 status) in response to a request for assistance (RFA) submitted by civil authorities. DSCA operations can be in response to manmade or natural events and can range from [hurricane relief](#), to supporting [wildland fire fighting](#), to [COVID-19 vaccination support](#) at the request

of FEMA.

Given the frequency with which some Governors activate their National Guard for emergency response operations, many Guardsmen are well versed in DSCA operations. While Active Duty forces respond to domestic crises with less regularity than National Guard compatriots, they can still prepare for DSCA missions, rather than end up in an on-the-job-training situation when time could be of the essence.

What You Can Do

The first step in preparing yourself or your organization to support DSCA should be to seek an understanding of the domestic operational environment. The [Congressional Research Service \(CRS\)](#) has a number of helpful primers that can help familiarize you with the legal aspects of DSCA. At a minimum, it is helpful to understand the [Stafford Act](#), Insurrection Act, and the [Posse Comitatus Act \(PCA\)](#). Additionally, read the [National Response Framework \(NRF\)](#) and understand the [Community Lifelines](#) to gain an understanding of how the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the emergency response enterprise tends to approach and frame disaster relief operations.

DSCA operations for Title 10 forces are most likely a departure from the norm, and may require a change in mindset—especially if the organization’s experience has predominantly been overseas combat operations. In DSCA scenarios, you’ll be a *supporting*, not the supported organization—get in, provide support, and get out. Forces responding to DSCA events are not changing the system, but rather, are operating within it.

Collective training is not really an option for DSCA, but there are several easy ways that leaders and individuals can still prepare themselves:

- Sign up for DSCA I on [Joint Knowledge Online \(JKO\)](#). Anyone can sign up, and it is only six hours long. DSCA I is a pre-requisite for the weeklong DSCA II course, which covers the topic in more depth. Completion of DSCA I could easily be combined with a unit Officer Professional Development (OPD) event.
- Members of all components and services can sign up for DSCA II, which is administered by the G 3/7 directorate of U.S. Army North (USARNORTH). DSCA II has traditionally been a one week course conducted in residence at Joint Base San Antonio (JBSA) and via Mobile Training Team (MTT). The course has adapted to continue operations under the COVID-19 conditions and has also conducted multiple iterations virtually. The DSCA II course delves deeper into DSCA operations, and includes

practical exercises and guest speakers. Graduates of DSCA II are granted access to the DSCA Phase III milsuite page, which is regularly updated with observations and lessons learned.

- For personnel at—or headed to—the resident Command and General Staff College for Intermediate Level Education (ILE) at Fort Leavenworth, the elective portion of the year has historically included a DSCA option.
- FEMA offers a variety of online [independent study](#) courses that range from the fundamentals of emergency management to the National Incident Management System (NIMS). These free courses are a great resource for those seeking an interagency perspective, or simply a deeper understanding of the larger emergency response system.
- Lastly, leaders can't go wrong with reviewing DSCA doctrine, specifically [Joint Publication 3-28](#) and [ADP 3-28](#).

Conclusion

In a military oriented on overseas contingencies, supporting the interagency and participating in DSCA operations can be a novel and rewarding experience. For officers whose interest in domestic operations goes beyond just being prepared for DSCA, they should seek out assignments at United States Army North (USARNORTH), and United States Northern Command (USNORTHCOM), where DSCA is just one of the mission sets, along with Homeland Defense and Theater Security Cooperation within the USNORTHCOM AOR.

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