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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Chemical units prepare for the worst

By Spc. Danielle Hash, 103rd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

CUSTER, S.D. – Imagine an average day in your quiet hometown, where the sun is shining and a warm breeze is pleasantly blowing through the streets...when all of a sudden...BOOM! A thunderous explosion breaks the tranquility, and the summer air fills with choking, poisonous smoke. Imagine realizing the unlikely has become reality; your town has been hit by a biological weapon.

To prepare for such a scenario, Soldiers from the Army Reserve's 323rd Chemical Company of Sioux Falls, S.D., and from Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment of the 468th Chemical Battalion, Arkansas Army National Guard, took part in realistic chemical decontamination training in the Southern Hills Wednesday, June 11, as part of the 2008 Golden Coyote training exercise.

"The training we're doing today is meant to maintain mission readiness and ensure we are fully capable to go wherever the mission requires," said Sgt 1st Class Andy Ellis, platoon leader with the 323rd.

Soldiers from both units worked together to hone their skills on decontamination procedures for personnel, vehicles and equipment. The members of the 323rd practiced their decontamination techniques on Soldiers of the 468th.

"The personnel decontamination process includes cleaning gear, removing all contaminated clothing, and seeking medical assistance, if necessary," said Spc. James Richter, a chemical specialist with the 323rd.

Soldiers were also 'sniffed' by an improved chemical agent monitor, which is a hand-held device that checks for chemical agent contamination.

"We use the ICAM to detect possible contaminants on personnel and equipment," said Spc. Russell Hofeldt, a chemical specialist with the 323rd. "If it reads a certain level, the individuals have to go back through the decontamination process again."

Ellis said the training provided at this year's annual training exercise was vital in meeting the demands of the unit's unique dual mission.

“As a unit, we have two missions: the ‘green mission,’ which is military specific, and the ‘white mission,’ which supports civilian emergency authorities,” said Ellis.

These ‘white missions’ can occur anywhere in the country, so it is necessary for members of the 323rd to constantly train to remain proficient in their skills, Ellis said.

Imagining biological devastation in your own back yard, or wherever your loved ones may be serving, emphasizes the importance of having highly-trained professionals such as the 323rd and the 468th ready to deploy.

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High resolution photos will be available at the following Web site:

LINK: <https://sdguard.ngb.army.mil/sites/GC2008/default.aspx>

Photo Cut Lines:

080611-A-8403H-3891.JPG: Spc. Gerad Van Essen, an Army Reserve chemical specialist of the 323rd Chemical Company, Sioux Falls, S.D., checks a humvee for possible chemical contamination as part of a simulated chemical decontamination exercise Wednesday, June 11, at Custer State Park, S.D. (Army National Guard photo by Spc. Danielle Hash) (RELEASED)

080611-A-8403H-3876.JPG: Spc. Russell Hofeldt, an Army Reserve chemical specialist of the 323rd Chemical Company, Sioux Falls, S.D., scrubs down a humvee to remove chemical contaminants as part of a simulated chemical decontamination exercise Wednesday, June 11, at Custer State Park, S.D. (Army National Guard photo by Spc. Danielle Hash) (RELEASED)

080611-A-8311R-050.JPG: Capt. Charles Fort, commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 468th Chemical Battalion, Arkansas Army National Guard, receives instruction on the proper way to remove chemical protective gear during a simulated chemical decontamination exercise Wednesday, June 11, at Custer State Park S.D. (Army Reserve photo by Pfc. Phil Regina) (RELEASED)

080611-A-8311R-048.JPG: Sgt. Paul Siemonsma, an Army Reserve chemical specialist of the 323rd Chemical Company, Sioux Falls, S.D., instructs Capt. Charles Fort, commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 468th Chemical Battalion, Arkansas Army National Guard, on the proper method to decontaminate face and hands during a simulated chemical decontamination exercise Wednesday, June 11, at Custer State Park, S.D. (Army Reserve photo by Pfc. Phil Regina) (RELEASED)

080611-A-8311R-034.JPG: Spc. James Richter, an Army Reserve chemical specialist for the 323rd Chemical Company, Sioux Falls, S.D., performs a personnel contamination check on Capt. Charles Fort, commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 468th Chemical Battalion, Arkansas Army National Guard, during a simulated chemical decontamination exercise Wednesday, June 11, at Custer State Park, S.D. (Army Reserve photo by Pfc. Phil Regina) (RELEASED)

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FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION about the South Dakota National Guard, please visit our Web site at <https://sdguard.ngb.army.mil/default.aspx>

NOTE: The South Dakota National Guard will host the annual Golden Coyote exercise from June 7 – 21 in the southern Black Hills. More than 4,000 service members from 92 units representing 27 states and four foreign nations are participating in the exercise. The Golden Coyote exercise has been conducted for the past 24 years. The exercise provides relevant training opportunities in support of the war on terror and homeland defense.

Residents should be aware of an increase in military traffic throughout the Black Hills and an increase in the level of noise due to military operations. Aviation activity will be operating out of Camp Rapid and the Army Aviation Support Facility next to the Rapid City Regional Airport.

Aircraft will be primarily training on equipment and personnel transport missions as well as medical evacuation. Aircraft will respond to real-world emergencies during the exercise and remain in an all-hours-ready status during the exercise.

Spectators to military training are welcome, however caution is warranted and spectators are asked to remain at a safe distance from all moving military vehicles and aircraft to prevent injury to personnel or damage to property.