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## Georgia Guard tests new decontamination equipment

By Sgt. 1st Class Roy Henry  
Georgia National Guard

CAMP BLANDING, Fla., (11/29/10) -- The Georgia National Guard's Joint Task Force (JTF) 781 and CBRNE Enhanced Response Force Package (CERFP) has tested two new pieces of sophisticated decontamination equipment that could become the standard for the National Guard in the future.

"We're going to encourage the highest levels of the National Guard Bureau in Washington to seriously consider these products and make them part of the CERFP inventory," said Sgt. 1st Class Shannon Richardson, a senior nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) specialist with the 781st which is based in Kennesaw, Ga.

The unit is one of several Guard JTF units in the nation conducting tests on the new decontamination equipment during a scheduled three-day exercise here at the Florida National Guard's Urban Defense and Disaster Response Training Site.

Its decontamination, medical and search and extraction personnel put the new gear through its paces to determine how well it meets their needs.

"I can't stress enough how important the support civil authority mission is to the JTF as a whole," Richardson said. "If there's equipment out there that's going to help us accomplish that mission more effectively, and better mitigate the dangers to our Soldiers and Airmen, then we're more than interested in having that technology in the hands of our people."

The new decontamination equipment will replace the bulky Kappler Z300 hazardous material suit currently used suit that requires three people to help put it on. It gets so hot, wearers can only operate in the field for a limited amount of time before coming back, and removing at least the upper part of the suit, just to cool off.

In addition to the cumbersome process of "suing up," the vintage 1980 suit tears easily – especially in cold weather – and requires a special chemical resistant tape put around the end of the sleeves and pants legs to make them seamless with the protective mask, gloves and overshoes, Richardson said.

"The old 'legacy' suit served us well, but there's something out there now that would better serve our needs," he said. "That's what we believe we've found in this new protective garment."

The new ensemble is constructed from special fabric that is lightweight and highly breathable, and it provides the wearer with better comfort during extended operations, Richard explains. Its one-piece design, with integrated glove and booties system, eliminates the need for chemical tape and allows personnel to get into the suit and on their way to a contaminated and dangerous environment quickly.

"At \$400 a piece – right in line with the cost of the old suit – it saves us, the Guard and Georgia taxpayers a lot of money while, at the same time providing, those who wear it with better protection, longer time out on the scene, and less problems with body heat," Richard said. "It's a win even for



A Georgia National Guard member from Joint Task Force 781 tests a new decontamination suit during a recent three-day exercise at the Florida National Guard's Urban Defense and Disaster Response Training Site at Camp Blanding. (Photo courtesy of the Georgia National Guard)

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the folks we're helping because we can spend even more time focusing on them and their needs."

The suit should be in the field by Fiscal Year 2012.

Staff Sgt. Bruce Sutherland has been with the 781st for nearly five years, and says he is excited about getting the new suit.

"I can't tell you how many times I've put on the old suit and wished we had something better," said Sutherland, a chemical specialist with Kennesaw's 138 Chemical Company – an element of the Joint Task Force. "This new suit is going to make our job much, much easier, and increase the time we have on scene. Those two things, alone, make it worth fielding in my mind."

Also being tested by task force personnel is a new dry decontamination "mitt" with adsorbent resin contained within a non-woven polyester material and a polyethylene film backing. Resin from the mitt is allowed to flow freely through the non-woven polyester pad material.

Decontamination is accomplished by adsorption of contamination by the non-woven pad and the resin, Richardson says. The new mitt is used to decontaminate the skin, clothing and footwear, and personal equipment.

This new mitt, touted by the manufacture – First Line Technology – as "the next generation of activated carbon dry decon," is a reusable product with a polyester outer shell and activated charcoal inner shell.

"Another selling point is that it can be used along with the water wash down during warmer weather. Overall, this new mitt, whether you use it alone or with water, will neutralize 80 to 90 percent of the decontaminate we come across."




Private 1st Class Jasmine Solomon, another chemical specialist with the 138th, says she thinks this new mitt, or anything like it, will add great advantage to the JTF's support to civil authority mission.

"The Guard has made it our business to provide a quick, well-coordinated response to the call for help in times of disaster," Solomon said. "We continually seek ways of improving our response and ability to provide the right kind of assistance at the right time."

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