

South Dakota National Guard Public Affairs Office

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

S.D. National Guard conducts rescue exercise in Jewel Cave

By Staff Sgt. Theanne Tangen
SDNG Public Affairs Office

CUSTER, S.D. – The South Dakota National Guard’s 82nd Civil Support Team paired up with personnel from Jewel Cave National Monument to conduct a mock cave rescue and emergency response exercise Thursday, Jan. 19.

The 82nd CST and Jewel Cave officials used the exercise as an opportunity to train in rescue operations and response to releases of chemical, biological or radioactive agents. The 82nd CST is South Dakota’s all-hazard response team with emphasis in the areas of chemical, biological and radiological incidents.

The emergency response exercise was designed around a scenario in which a Jewel Cave employee discovers a radioactive container located inside the cave. Personnel from the Monument notified law enforcement officials of the potential threat, who then contacted the 82nd based at Ellsworth Air Force Base.

The unit dispatched 14 personnel and equipment to Jewel Cave and began their investigation.

“We like to train like this because this is the stuff people have actually seen in real life and it betters us as a team to know what to do in these types of situations,” said Army Staff Sgt. Alex Raber, communications noncommissioned officer for the 82nd.

Two survey members from the CST, Air Force Staff Sgt. Dustin Clement and Army Sgt. Eric Haivala, entered the cave searching for the radiation source using detection equipment. The team found the radiation source and using a cave phone reported to their commander for further instructions on how to handle the material.

As the survey members continued to search for more radiation sources their training evaluator informed them that Clement, “fractured his right lower leg” adding another challenge to the scenario.

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They now needed to contact a back-up team made up of Jewel Cave and Custer County Search and Rescue personnel to come inside and rescue Clement.

Once the back-up team was able to locate Clement and remove him from the cave, they took him outside to a decontamination area.

Although Clement made it out safely, the CST's mission was not complete, they still needed to remove the radiation source.

Twelve hours later, the CST and a FBI agent re-entered the cave and removed the radiation source.

The chances of the CST team being called to respond to an incident at Jewel Cave are rare but we need to be prepared, said Larry Johnson, superintendent of Jewel Cave National Monument.

"You learn in the National Park Service to never, say never," he said. "You don't think things like this will happen. We hope they don't, but we want to be prepared if it does occur."

The CST and the National Park Service both benefit from training together.

"This exercise gives the Guard unit a unique opportunity that they wouldn't get otherwise, to train in an environment that is really not a normal situation for them. Plus it's a learning experience for us. They are able to point out things that we are not able to see," said Johnson. "It's also great to know they are nearby at Ellsworth to assist us. We are just thrilled that they are here."

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PHOTOS: High-resolution photos for this release are available upon request or at: www.flickr.com/southdakotationalguard



120119-A-CW157-090: Air Force Staff Sgt. Dustin Clement, Ellsworth AFB, and Army Staff Sgt. Eric Haivala, Sturgis, both members of the South Dakota National Guard 82nd Civil Support Team, search for radiation sources during a rescue training exercise Jan.19, 2012, at the Jewel Cave National Monument near Custer, S.D. The 82nd CST and the National Park Service worked together to detect a radiation source during a rescue training exercise to strengthen their relationship and protocols for a real-life scenario. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Theanne Tangen) (RELEASED)



120119-A-CW157-166: – Army Staff Sgt. Eric Haivala, Sturgis, makes a phone call to confirm they found a radiation source inside the Jewel Cave National Monument as Air Force Staff Sgt. Dustin Clement, Ellsworth AFB, assists with information during a rescue training exercise Jan.19, 2012, at the Jewel Cave National Monument near Custer, S.D. Both Haivala and Clement are members of the South Dakota National Guard's 82nd Civil Support Team that worked with the National Park Service to detect a radiation source during a rescue training exercise practice protocols for a real-life scenario. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Theanne Tangen) (RELEASED)



120119-A-CW157-204: Employees of the Jewel Cave National Monument and Custer County's Search and Rescue Team practice rescuing Air Force Staff Sgt. Dustin Clement, 82nd Civil Support Team, Ellsworth AFB, from a toxic area during a mock rescue training exercise Jan. 19, 2012, at the Jewel Cave near Custer, S.D. The 82nd CST and the National Park Service worked together to detect a radiation source during a rescue training exercise to strengthen their relationship and protocols for a real-life scenario. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Theanne Tangen) (RELEASED)



120119-A-CW157-254: : Employees of the Jewel Cave National Monument and Custer County's Search and Rescue Team practice rescuing Air Force Staff Sgt. Dustin Clement, 82nd Civil Support Team, Ellsworth AFB, from a toxic area during a mock rescue training exercise Jan. 19, 2012, at the Jewel Cave near Custer, S.D. The 82nd CST and the National Park Service worked together to detect a radiation source during a rescue training exercise to strengthen their relationship and protocols for a real-life scenario. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Theanne Tangen) (RELEASED)



120119-A-CW157-273: Members of the South Dakota National Guard's 82nd Civil Support Team practice decontaminating an injured team member Air Force Staff Sgt. Dustin Clement, Ellsworth AFB, from a toxic area during a mock rescue training exercise Jan. 19, 2012, at the Jewel Cave National Monument near Custer, S.D. The 82nd CST and the National Park Service worked together to detect a radiation source during a rescue training exercise to strengthen their relationship and protocols for a real-life scenario. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Theanne Tangen) (RELEASED)

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