



Georgetown County, South Carolina

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

County to participate in full-scale disaster preparedness exercise March 3-12; public should expect to see strong military presence

GEORGETOWN COUNTY — Georgetown County will be the site of and perform a key role in a major multi-state, multi-agency disaster preparedness exercise March 3 -12. During this time, the public should expect to see unusual activity, including military aircraft flying overhead, as well as a large military presence on land and water throughout the county.

The bulk of the activity for the exercise will take place March 6-9. Public viewing areas will be set up to allow area residents to observe some of the exercise activities during this period. Additionally, the county will need to temporarily close some of its parks and recreational facilities during this time to accommodate exercise activities. A full list of observation opportunities and closings is included below.

Known as Operation Vigilant Guard, this national exercise is sponsored by U.S. Northern Command in conjunction with the National Guard Bureau, and takes place in communities throughout the country. Part of its purpose is to test and enhance relationships between civilian, local, federal and military partners as participants react to simulated emergencies. Local emergency responders and emergency management staff, along with other county and municipal personnel will have a chance to train alongside military personnel and get a feel for how those agencies will interact and be able to help each other in a real emergency.

The scenario for the exercise in March involves landfall of a Category 4 hurricane following a track similar to that of Hurricane Hugo in 1989. The fictitious storm will move through the Palmetto State into North Carolina, leaving widespread destruction and havoc in its path.

Georgetown County will be a lead player in the exercise, along with the S.C. National Guard and S.C. Emergency Management Division. Counties across the state will also participate along with military, federal and agency partners.

A mobile emergency operations center will be set up at the Georgetown County Airport, which will be hard hit by the hypothetical storm. The S.C. Air National Guard will offer assistance by bringing in resources to support mobile communications and setting up a mobile air traffic control center. Carolinas HealthCare System will be present with Carolinas MED-1, a mobile hospital for disasters and hospital outages.

Also for the exercise, the S.C. Helicopter Aquatic Rescue Team's (SC-HART) Blackhawk

helicopters will be brought in for search and rescue operations; the National Guard will utilize Black Hawk, Chinook and Lacota helicopters for surveying and rescue operations; and ferrying operations will take place on the Sampit river near the county's Carroll A. Campbell Marine Complex. Three launch ramps at the complex will remain open to the public throughout the exercise. The Choppee Recreational Complex and parts of East Bay Park will also be heavily utilized during the exercise.

Sam Hodge, the county's emergency manager, said he hopes the drill will raise public awareness and motivate residents to make their own emergency plans, not only for hurricanes, but the myriad of disasters the county is vulnerable to, from wildfires to earthquakes. It's important that residents know how to prepare and respond to different kinds of emergency situations they may be faced with.

"It's never too early to start getting ready, but it can easily be too late," Hodge said.

Residents can find resources to help with their emergency planning at www.gtcountry.org/emergency_management or www.scemd.org. Residents may also call Georgetown County's Emergency Management Division at (843) 545-3273.

Public Viewing Opportunities

Members of the public will be able to safely observe some of the activities taking place during Operation Vigilant Guard at the following times and locations. Signs will direct motorists to observation and parking areas. Please be aware that parking may be limited in some locations.

Friday, March 6 – Sunday, March 8

- 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Georgetown County Airport Terminal building — This location provides a long-distance view of the expansive operations and activities taking place across the runway. This is the only location from which operations at the airport may be viewed.

Saturday, March 7

- 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Hobcaw Point Fishing and Observation Pier — The S.C. Helicopter Aquatic Rescue Team (SC-HART) will utilize a Blackhawk helicopter to practice rescues, pulling "victims" from the Waccamaw River. (Please note that only Hobcaw Point Fishing and Observation Pier — the east side of the pier — will be open to the public. Winyah Pier — the western half — will be closed for use by the military as part of the operation.
- 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Carroll A. Campbell Marine Complex — Ferrying operations on the Sampit River will involve construction of a temporary floating bridge to ferry equipment and supplies.

Sunday, March 8

- 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., western corner of Choppee Recreation Complex, Choppee Road — Various military and agency mass casualty search and rescue operations.

Closings

Georgetown County government has scheduled the following closings of county-operated parks and facilities to accommodate disaster preparedness training activities during Operation

Vigilant Guard:

- Beck Recreation Center will be closed March 6-11. All regular practices and activities at that location are cancelled.
- Choppee Recreational Complex will be closed March 6-11. All regular practices and activities at that location are cancelled.
- The football field and large baseball field at East Bay Park will be closed March 6-11. Other areas of the park will remain open.
- All areas of Stables Park Field Complex, including walking areas, will be closed on March 10.

** Please note that though operations will take place at the Carroll A. Campbell Marine Complex, that facility will remain open to the public for boat launching and river access.*

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