Supporting National Guard Service Members Activated for Domestic Operations

National Guard Domestic Operations (DOMOPS) are missions conducted within the United States in support of civil authorities, border security, public safety, and community stability. These missions may occur in service members' own communities and can place them in emotionally complex, morally challenging, and operationally ambiguous environments. In addition, public sentiment about missions beyond disaster support can be mixed, presenting additional potential frictions for service members.

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While service members remain resilient and mission-ready, the scope, frequency, and tempo of DOMOPS have increased significantly in recent years, creating cumulative exposure to stressors that can affect service members' well-being, their families, and their long-term readiness. In addition to expected activation stressors, such as separation from family and civilian employment disruption, DOMOPS can differ from traditional overseas deployments in important ways.

UNIQUE DOMOPS STRESSORS

Short Notice and Uncertain Duration

- Missions often begin with limited preparation time, and end dates may be unclear.
- Transition to and from active duty can disrupt pay, benefits, medical coverage, and continuity of care leading to increased Guard member stress and family strain.

Community and Family Proximity

- Service members often operate in their own communities, interacting with neighbors, coworkers, and vulnerable populations. This can also include service members living at home and trying to balance family commitments and communications while activated.
- This proximity can heighten emotional strain, role conflict, and moral stress.

Operational Friction

- Service members may experience variability in chains of command and rules for the use of force, especially when transitioning between different duty statuses.
- When Guard members are mobilized involuntarily, this can compound stress associated with the activation.

Distinct Risks for Moral Distress or Injury

Moral injury is a condition characterized by persistent guilt, shame, remorse, or feelings of betrayal following perceived violations of deeply held moral beliefs. Moral injury is distinct from PTSD and requires different prevention and recovery approaches.

- DOMOPS may involve ethically complex decisions related to:
  - » Immigration operations
  - » Disaster triage and life-and-death resource allocation
  - » Civil unrest response

Continued

HOW TO HELP

Be curious and avoid assumptions

- Remember that each mission and each service member's response can be different.
- Do not assume domestic activations are "easier" than overseas deployments.
- Ask the Guard member about their experience.
  - » In addition to operational stress, service members may describe positive experiences related to:
    - Protecting their local community and serving their fellow citizens
    - Camaraderie and shared purpose with other service members and local, state, and federal partners

Use Psychological First Aid principles to provide psychoeducation and early support to promote:

- Safety
- Calm
- Connectedness
- Self-efficacy
- Hope

Reduce moral injury risk through:

- Engaging in open, neutral discussion of difficult events
- Normalizing human limitations in high-stakes situations
- Advocating for balanced responsibility without excessive self-blame
- Encouraging peer, spiritual, and mental health support
- Reinforcing forgiveness and self-compassion

Encourage service member self-advocacy by connecting with additional appropriate resources such as:

- Chain of Command
- National Guard Psychological Health Program
- National Guard Family Programs
- Chaplain corps
- Legal assistance from Inspector General or Judge Advocate General

Closing Reminder

DOMOPS do not always lead to trauma exposure, moral distress, or increased mental health issues for service members. Service members are adaptable and resilient, and many are activated with minimal or short-term stress responses. Commitment to effective services and support can help ensure a speedy return to health and readiness for service members returning from DOMOPS.

Additional Resources

- Understanding Moral Injury. Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress. **https://www.cstsonline.org/assets/media/documents/csts-fs-understanding-moral-injury.pdf**
- Psychological First Aid: How You Can Support Well-Being in Disaster Victims. Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress. **https://www.cstsonline.org/assets/media/documents/CSTS_FS_Psychological%20First%20Aid_Support_Well_Being_of_%20Disaster_Victims.pdf**

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