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Corps of Engineers focuses on deployment opportunities in town hall meeting

By Lacey Justinger, Honolulu District Public Affairs

(FORT SHAFTER, HI NR 30-09) Honolulu District and Pacific Ocean Division employees at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers gathered at Fort Shafter Gym for a town hall meeting and to attend an Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) and disaster response/emergency relief Planning and Response Team (PRT) deployment information fair, Nov. 18.

Brig. Gen. Mark W. Yenter, commanding general and division engineer for the Pacific Ocean Division, discussed the Corps of Engineers' response to the American Samoa tsunami and the talented efforts displayed by District and Division emergency operations, PRTs and subject-matter-experts.

"It's our job to support FEMA in disaster relief; and there was amazing teamwork between the response from FEMA, the Corps of Engineers and other government agencies," said Yenter. "The reach-back to the Honolulu District has been phenomenal. Additional tasks rolled down to the Honolulu District; they stepped up and made it a reality. They couldn't have done it better. The people of American Samoa are going to come back stronger than ever and we're going to be there with them through this long-term recovery process."

Yenter also addressed the future policy changes and opportunities available in PRTs and OCO, and reiterated that supporting OCO is the number one mission for the Division.

"This Division leads the Corps in the percentage of people who volunteer to support OCO, and we have for a long time, even though we are a small Division," said Yenter. "It's the most important thing that we do."

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Deployment 2-2-2

The Pacific Ocean Division averages 5 percent of its workforce deployed in OCO missions. Many employees also serve on multiple PRTs and may deploy on short notice after natural or man-made disasters.

“It’s important to support the families of those who deploy not only for OCO but for PRT missions,” said Yenter. “The Family Readiness Program is phenomenal. In the same calendar year that it was developed; they have leveraged the help that is available to families. It’s important to know what we can do for you and to get help when you need it.”

The Pacific Ocean Division Family Readiness Program sponsored the deployment information expo to promote understanding of the support available for families of deployed civilians, whether for OCO or PRT.

“This is to help families and deployed individuals, and ensure they have all the information that they need,” said Juli Chytka, from the Pacific Ocean Division Family Readiness Program. “Many civilians and their families are not aware of what they are entitled to.”

Employees had the opportunity to speak to representatives and gather information from Army OneSource; Blue Star Card Program; Military OneSource; the Red Cross; Military and Family Life Consultants; and the Army Community Service (ACS) Deployment/Mobilization program and Financial Management and Readiness program.

“We are here to let civilians know what ACS has to offer them as part of the military community and the Army Family,” said Lis Olsen, outreach director for ACS. “We’re here to serve the deployed civilians and families as well as the Soldiers. The need is great and we don’t want anyone to hesitate because they are concerned that their family is not taken care of.”

The Pacific Ocean Division Family Readiness Group will also connect families of deployed, deploying or recently returned civilians and Soldiers to provide an outlet for families to share experiences and problems, said Zenaida Bate, the community support coordinator.