

Why and what is NEO

Evacuations may be necessary as a result of either man-made or natural disasters. Natural disasters include, but not limited to hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, volcanoes and typhoons. Man-made disasters include toxic spills, industrial accidents and nuclear/enemy attack. In any disaster it is essential that families are well prepared to evacuate. Several installation agencies are prepared to provide evacuation relief services. Within the Army, ACS has a large involvement in preparing families for evacuation and providing post-disaster services.

In order to diminish the negative effects of an evacuation, readiness requires individual and installation preparation, availability of comprehensive relief assistance, and attention to long-term recovery. For an ACS this translates into educating families, preparing to meet evacuees' basic needs and preparing to address long-term recovery issues by supporting them. Preparedness and planning, as well as response and recovery issues, are addressed for each stage of an evacuation.

Purpose of NEO

Simply put, the purpose of NEO is to quickly and safely move Non-Combatant Evacuees (NCEs) from foreign countries where their lives may be endangered by war, civil unrest, or natural disaster.

Preparation and Planning for NEO and Repatriation

When evacuation begins, there is no time to define roles and responsibilities. Without prior planning and preparation, evacuees may not receive all the assistance they need. This will add unnecessary stress to evacuees as well as frustrate service providers who must be ready to provide a wide-range of family assistance.

Pre-disaster planning is a primary method of mitigating negative post-disaster effects. By being prepared, Soldiers and family members will develop a sense of well-being and a greater confidence in their ability to cope in emergency situations. Community service providers should be ready to work with individuals to help diminish the stress that results from man-made or natural disasters. Therefore, community preparedness is instrumental to supporting families during evacuations.

History of NEO Evacuations

The Department of State has called upon the Department of Defense for assistance with Noncombatant Evacuation Operations throughout history.

NEO and Repatriation Communication Flow and Agency Designation/ Responsibility

Department of State (DOS) has NEO execution authority. They are responsible for directing a NEO. The US Ambassador (Chief of Missions/COM) is the senior US

government authority, not combatant commanders, which makes NEO unique among military operations.

DOS objectives for NEO are to protect U.S. citizens and designated aliens living abroad; to provide oversight of NEO processes from evacuation to safe haven, and to reduce harm and risk to citizens.

The Army is the designated DOD Executive Agent for NEO Repatriation Plans/Operations. The Army, as Executive Agent over NEO, provides primary interface/liaison with Joint Chiefs, US Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM), and the Combatant Commanders (COCOM), Department of State, and other Federal, State and local agencies. They also coordinate and provide oversight, guidance and Direction for the conduct of repatriation operations, and act as functional proponent for the Non-combatant Operations (NEO) Tracking System (NTS). They will establish the Joint Repatriation Coordination Center (JRCC) when required.

The Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) has a large role in evacuating/repatriating US citizens. They are especially relevant to the repatriation sites process. They have a responsibility of safely repatriating US citizens.

Department of Defense (DOD) may be called upon by the DOS to assist with NEO. If so, the Geographic Commander (PACOM, EUCOM, Socom, NORTHCOM, CENTCOM, AFRICOM, etc.) for the affected area will be contacted to begin implementing NEO plans. The information will flow to installation leadership responsible for a particular NEO process. Installation Emergency Operations Centers (EOC) will stand up and call on the installation commander's NEO Coordinator to put local plans into action.

Department of State (DOS) Approved Orders

DOS uses various types of "orders" to begin moving US non-combatants from areas affected by war, civil unrest, or natural disasters. The level of risk/danger determines which order to drop. Often, before an order drops, there may be a recognizable sequence of events that takes place. An overseas area may hear of travel alerts / warnings being initiated by DOS. This may be fair warning of what is to come, but could be a measure of caution the government will signal to US citizens. DOS continuously observes what is going on around the globe.

Some American citizens living abroad, may decide to self-evacuate an area when they see/hear travel alerts. However, DOD military and civilian entitlements benefits may not be authorized until at least the authorized/ordered departure. However, Families must evaluate their own needs/concerns for safety.

An authorized departure is voluntary. It is not a mandatory evacuation order, but if non-essential military/civilian personnel and/or families leave the area, they should receive evacuation entitlements.

An ordered departure is a mandatory evacuation and people MUST evacuate the area. Once DOS issues an ordered departure, DOD will likely follow with a

separate military order for all command-sponsored Families to evacuate and receive full evacuation entitlements.

Noncombatant Evacuees (NCE)

For organizational purposes all Noncombatant Evacuees (NCE) receive a number priority and classification designator. These categorizations are critical to the smooth execution and success of the operation and are used when identifying, moving, and locating evacuees. The U.S. also provides evacuation assistance to other designated persons as DOS authorizes.

First priority for evacuation (category I) are U.S. citizens with current identification (passports, birth certificates, DOD ID cards, etc., and anyone the Ambassador deems, regardless of national affiliation.) The Ambassador is the final authority.

NOTE: The U.S. Ambassador has the final determination on order of NCE movement. When uncertain situations are presented during evacuation, staff should visit the DOS station sitting on the processing line for clarification.

Family Programs and ACS Center Overall General Roles and Responsibilities with NEO and Repatriation

The types of support and assistance that ACS can provide during an evacuation and repatriation has evolved over the years, and out of lessons learned from real world events. Evacuations from natural and manmade disasters have helped to refine the role of the ACS Center and the specific activities an ACS Center may be responsible for during each of the stages of a NEO/Repatriation.

Responsibility for the mechanics of an evacuation (the process itself) is not the responsibility of Family Programs/ACS. Evacuations are the responsibility of many agencies at many levels of the Army, and each has a critical role. In order to better understand where ACS Centers fit into an evacuation, many public laws, Department of Defense Instructions, and Army MOUs are available and describe, in detail, the responsibility and authority of ACS during evacuation contingencies. Some are listed in the reference section of this Operational Guide.

Primary role of the ACS Center is to assist by educating, preparing, and supporting Soldiers and Families in crisis. The Joint Plan for DOD Noncombatant Repatriation states that Families have a personal responsibility to have proper documents required for repatriation and entitlements. ACS staff must incorporate this educational training to Soldiers and Families well before disaster strikes. We must help educate and prepare our Families by educating them on the importance of taking inventory of what they absolutely need to have ready to go and in order to "reestablish their lives" if disaster strikes.

Stages and Cycle of NEO and Repatriation

Evacuation: Departure from an area due to a natural or manmade disaster.

Safe Haven: An area evacuee Families have chosen to remain throughout the disaster period, and until they either return to the evacuated area or move on to a new permanent duty station.

Final Destination: Return to the evacuated area or relocate to a new permanent duty station.

ACS Roles and Responsibilities with Evacuation:

OCONUS Family Centers assist in the development of evacuation plans and prepare DOD Families for an eventual evacuation. CONUS Family Centers provide essential services during the repatriation operation, and local assistance and aide when Families reach their safe haven/final destination.”

It is necessary that ACS takes an active part in assisting with pre-disaster education and planning. Centers should offer many disaster preparedness briefs/workshops, (i.e., information briefs and handouts at Newcomers’ Orientation and other forums) that provide an opportunity to train Soldiers and Family members on disasters, how to be “ready” and what to expect if it became necessary to evacuate the area. In addition to commanders and Personnel, the ACS Staff should be providing information/awareness of the systems that play a large role in accountability and self-assessment during/after disaster. For example, the Army Disaster Personnel Accountability and Assessment System (ADPAAS) is one area where continuous education must take place to educate Soldiers & family members and let them know they are empowered (families too!) to self account/assess.

Noncombatant Evacuees (NCE) have Responsibility for Family Readiness too!

Just as CONUS families prepare for natural disasters prevalent to their areas, so must OCONUS Families prepare for potential natural and/or manmade disasters. Preparation should include NEO kits and NEO packets.

NEO packet: DOD Families must be provided information regarding necessary documentation for noncombatant evacuations.

To be accepted for relocation and evacuation, NCEs must present proof of citizenship or other documentation that validates ties to the U.S. Additionally, they will need documentation to ensure they receive proper safe haven entitlements and process a Repatriation Center expeditiously. Other critical documentation to be included in a member/Family’s NEO packet may include employment documents, household goods inventory, medical/immunization documents, will/life insurance policy information, financial records, spouse/child school documents, vehicle registration/title, etc.

NEO Kit: In addition to the documentation listed (and necessary for family members to reestablish their lives when they arrive in safe haven status), Soldiers and Family members should consider putting together a kit of emergency supplies. They may consider a 3-day supply of food, baby and personal toiletries, first aid kit, flashlights/batteries, extra clothing, etc. For a

recommended list of items, refer to the Joint Plan for DOD Noncombatant Repatriation, Annex N.

Safe Haven Stage Defined:

Once repatriated, NCEs select a safe haven within the U.S. where they remain until they are authorized to return to the evacuated location or are reassigned to a new duty location.

The entitlements message states that the evacuation is evaluated every 30 days. If at 30 days DOS determines it must be extended, they will issue a cable for the extension and evacuation entitlements will continue. By 180 days, DOS will likely determine whether or not evacuees can return to the evacuated area or if they should be moved on to a new permanent duty station (PDS). The return to an evacuated area or the new PDS becomes the Final Destination, and the NEO process is complete.

ACS Roles and Responsibilities with Safe Haven:

DOD Family Centers play a significant role in the support of families regardless of Service affiliation.

Center staff will work with evacuees as they do with all local customers, but address their particular circumstances to meet their unique needs. Staff should inform Families to work with the local Finance office to begin evacuation entitlements, and address all concerns they may have indicated on their ADPAAS needs assessment (if they completed one). Collaborate with appropriate community agencies locally to assist (i.e., legal, housing, childcare, schools, American Red Cross, FEMA, etc.)

Upon termination of the evacuation, DOD Family Centers provide official notification to the evacuees and assist with their return and personal property shipment.