

## ❖ my turn

### State Guard provides valuable service to S.C.

OCT. 5, 2012 -- The Scout motto is "Be Prepared." Scouts are taught to always remain ready and prepared for duty.



Eckstrom

That's wonderful preparation for anyone when it comes to dealing with the curve balls that life throws at us every now and then. This kind of preparation was very evident of the [S.C. State Guard](#) during two emergencies the guard responded to a few years ago.

The first occurred in January 2005 in the small Aiken County mill town of Graniteville.

Many South Carolinians might remember it all too well. In predawn darkness, a fast-moving freight train hauling 270 tons of liquid chlorine, along with other hazardous chemicals, slammed into a train parked on the same track adjacent to an operating textile mill.

The crash tore open a liquid chlorine container car, causing the lethal substance to spew out and mix with the air in a poisonous gas cloud.

Nine people died in the tragedy, and 5,400 folks were separated from their homes in the aftermath.

Graniteville has come a long way since the accident, which was caused by a track switching device mistakenly left in the wrong position, but the community still feels the effects of the disaster.

When this accident unfolded, a few State Guard members were among the first emergency responders on the scene. They helped law enforcement quickly evacuate the town and maintain a perimeter around the lethal accident site. For several days other State Guardsmen volunteered to operate a coordinated communications system for the many local, state and federal agencies involved in Graniteville's massive recovery effort.

Less than 18 months later in June 2006, the State Guard quickly responded again when a mill fire wreaked havoc on another small town - Great Falls, bordering the Catawba River in Chester County.

Chemicals stored in the Great Falls mill building, which housed a plastics company and a furniture business at the time, seeped into the fortress-like structure, causing the fire to burn for more than a week. Because firefighters initially were unable to get through the thick stone walls to the source of the fire, dense plumes of hazardous smoke forced many Great Falls residents to evacuate.



State Guard members responded to the situation within hours, assisting with the evacuation and bringing in their loaded communications trailer, which provided ground-level directional support for National Guard helicopters to dump water on the blaze.

The State Guard also had the only qualified person on-scene to operate a hazardous materials bulldozer, which eventually punched holes in the mill walls to provide firefighters access to the flames inside.

Both crises demonstrate the phenomenally important role of the S.C. State Guard in serving as an all-volunteer state defense force to assist communities in the event of natural disasters and other emergencies.

Yet you often don't hear about State Guardsmen in media accounts of such events. But as commander of the State Guard, I can tell you firsthand that our members are not in it for the recognition.

Indeed, our main concern is the safety and well-being of our fellow South Carolinians.

As it happens, many of you who no doubt plan to visit the State Fair in Columbia this year have an opportunity to learn more about the State Guard and meet some of our members.

Amid the flashing lights, wafting scents and ringing sounds of the fair, State Guard members will man a booth in the Ruff Building during the 12-day run of the festivities (Oct. 10 to Oct. 21).

We invite you to stop by and visit. And, if you're interested, consider joining our ranks.

The State Guard presents an opportunity for South Carolinians -- men and women, young and old -- to serve their fellow citizens in uniform. Prior military service is not required for membership. Except for a few weight and age limits, we are open to all law-abiding residents of our state who are dedicated to service.

And while the duties are unpaid, the rewards are invaluable.

Richard Eckstrom is comptroller general for the state of South Carolina.

## ❖ feedback

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- [feedback@statehousereport.com](mailto:feedback@statehousereport.com)

## ❖ scorecard

### Two up, one down

 **Finally!** Boeing will finally hand-over to Air India the first-ever 787 built in South Carolina, which will be flown away on Saturday, after a series of delays. [More](#).

 **Crossover.** South Carolina native and Charleston-area resident Darius Rucker, frontman of the frat-rock pop band Hootie and the Blowfish, became just the third black inducted into the Grand Ole Opry. [More](#).

 **FOIA.** State agencies may be charging waaay too much for producing forms and records meant to be publicly available. [More](#).

## ❖ credits

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