



# NEWS RELEASE

## Defense Commissary Agency

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### Expanded commissary shipments help Navy Exchange support Haiti relief efforts

*By Kevin L. Robinson,  
DeCA public affairs specialist*

**FORT LEE, Va.** – The Defense Commissary Agency sent extra shipments of grocery-related supplies to the Naval Exchange Service Command’s NEXMART store at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The shipments expanded that store’s ability to support an influx of military personnel supporting Operation Unified Response, the U.S. military’s relief effort in Haiti.

“As the Department of Defense engages in this herculean humanitarian relief effort in Haiti, we stand prepared to support our troops as needed,” said DeCA Director and CEO Philip E. Sakowitz Jr. “We already have an existing supply agreement with the Navy Exchange in Cuba, so we were ready to help.”

The commissary agency’s supply agreement with NEXCOM means that the NEXMART in Cuba is normally supplied perishable and nonperishable goods via a commercial distributor. NEXCOM needed to increase these shipments to accommodate the addition of U.S. military personnel to Guantanamo Bay to support the Haiti relief effort, said Randy Eller, who is overseeing the operation as chief of the grocery division in DeCA’s operations directorate.

From January to February, DeCA arranged for 13 additional containers of products in three shipments to be added to the regular NEXMART supply shipment. Ordinarily, NEXCOM receives an average of 27 containers of commissary products per month. These items include various cases of soup, tuna, salmon, oysters, vegetables, beans, corned beef, canned sausages, cereal, powdered milk, coffee, juice, sports drinks and personal hygiene products. A container

weighs about 40,000 to 45,000 pounds.

“We are very involved in supporting NEXCOM operations in Gitmo,” said Eller, referring to Guantanamo Bay by its military slang acronym. “This is strictly the military resale side of the house for service members – not Haiti relief. However, some of our commissaries are receiving requests for water from the units deploying to Haiti.”

In the opening days of the relief mission, Guantanamo Bay became home to more than 100 service members assigned to Task Force 48, a joint logistics hub set up to help manage the personnel, food and equipment involved in Operation Unified Response, according to a Jan. 24 American Forces Press article.

Within hours of the magnitude 7.0 earthquake that hit the Haitian capital of Port-Au-Prince Jan. 12, the U.S. military joined a worldwide relief effort to help respond to the needs of the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. Preliminary reports are that an estimated 150,000 to 200,000 people may have perished in the destruction.

The Defense Logistics Agency is delivering troop support to military responders as well as some assistance to Haitians, according to DoD news reports. Since the earthquake, the Defense Supply Center-Philadelphia has coordinated the delivery of more than 2.8 million ready-to-eat meals and 500,000 bottles of water in support of U.S. forces and U.S. Agency for International Development requirements. DLA support also includes tents, cots, blankets, sheets and personal hygiene items.

“We have contacted DLA and offered support if needed for water or subsistence from our installation commissaries,” Eller said.

Supporting military activities during emergency operations is nothing new to DeCA. During a crisis operation, the commissary agency is authorized by DoD to support local military commanders with commissary products as needed.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, DeCA’s New Orleans Commissary’s parking lot was used for a helicopter pad and troop feeding point for soldiers from the Army’s 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry and 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne divisions. Many stores near the hurricane impact area coordinated commissary vendor donations of water and other emergency supplies.

“Our mission to provide the commissary benefit includes supporting the U.S. military whenever and wherever we are called to do so,” Sakowitz said. “We are proud to help them as they help the Haitian people recover from this disaster.”

*(Christen N. McCluney, of the Defense Media Activity’s emerging media directorate, and Beth*

*Reece, of the Defense Logistics Agency's strategic communications office, both contributed to this story)*

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**About DeCA:** *The Defense Commissary Agency operates a worldwide chain of commissaries providing groceries to military personnel, retirees and their families in a safe and secure shopping environment. Authorized patrons purchase items at cost plus a 5-percent surcharge, which covers the costs of building new commissaries and modernizing existing ones. Shoppers save an average of more than 30 percent on their purchases compared to commercial prices – savings worth about \$3,300 annually for a family of four. A core military family support element, and a valued part of military pay and benefits, commissaries contribute to family readiness, enhance the quality of life for America's military and their families, and help recruit and retain the best and brightest men and women to serve their country.*