

The Army's Safeguard Ballistic Missile Defense System in northeast North Dakota Tuesday achieves initial operational capability, according to information given to Sen. Milton R. Young, R-ND, by the Army's Safeguard Command.

The Safeguard system, under construction since 1970, is now integrated into the nation's defense system under the operational control of the Continental Air Defense Command (CONAD). It is named after Lt. Gen. Stanley R. Mickelsen, a native of St. Paul, MN, and a pioneer in the Army's guided missile program.

The Safeguard system is one of the most complex and advanced weapons systems in the world and contains two large phased array radars, according to Army officials.

The Missile Site Radar is located near Nekoma, ND, and the Perimeter Acquisition Radar is near Mountain, ND. The site work force consists of more than 500 soldiers, 170 government civilians, and 1,300 contractor employees. When fully operational later this year, the site will have 70 short range Sprint and 30 long range Spartan missiles installed.

Safeguard, an outgrowth of 20 years of ballistic missile defense research and development work, is the nation's first and only ballistic missile defense system.

Initial operational capability, according to Glen Robertson, Safeguard's public affairs officer at the Nekoma, ND, site, means that the three-site team - Missile Site Radar (MSR) at Nekoma, Perimeter Acquisition Radar (PAR) at Concrete, ND, and Ballistic Missile Defense Command (BMDC), Colorado Springs, CO - has now been netted together electronically. Previous to this time, each had reached the capability to perform independently in support of the primary mission, which is the protection of the Minuteman missile sites in North Dakota.

Final operational capability will come sometime this summer or fall when all work involved in the mission is completed. One of the major steps to be accomplished is the emplacement of the defense missiles - Sprints and Spartans - in the silos at the MSR and at other locations in the area.