

<Filename: OEC_A_MRC_UPDATE_7>
<Department: Articles>
<Words: 967>
<Art: 1 photo of MRC volunteers checking vitals>

MRC Update: NSP Members Aid Community Health Efforts

By virtue of their training in Outdoor Emergency Care and a seemingly innate desire to help out in times of need, NSP members are finding new prospects for offering aid—far removed from the snowy slopes, mountain environments, and river runs where they typically ply their skills.

One entity that's put out the welcome mat for association members is the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC). Housed in the Office of the U.S. Surgeon General, the MRC carries out the mission of improving the health and safety of cities, towns, counties, and rural districts across the country by organizing and utilizing public health, medical, and other volunteers. MRC units are community-based and locally run. MRC volunteers can apply their professional expertise to contribute to a variety of public health activities, including emergency response.

NSP members were first apprised of the efforts of the MRC—and the opportunities that exist for their involvement therein—in an article titled “Medical Reserve Corps: Another Niche for Your Skills” (summer 2005). Consider the article you're now reading an update on the program, which has grown to over 650 MRC units in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Palau, and Guam, with more than 120,000 volunteers taking part.

COMMUNITY RESPONSE

Local MRC units are encouraged to promote and support activities that have an all-hazards and broad-based public health focus. In addition, MRC units are particularly encouraged to take on activities that align with the U.S. Surgeon General's public health priorities of increasing prevention efforts, eliminating health disparities, and enhancing public health preparedness. Some examples of recent activities include the following:

- MRC volunteers from three different regional MRC units were called up to assist with relief efforts, including staffing tetanus immunization clinics, following the April 2007 tornadoes that devastated parts of Kansas.
- Members of the Moore County (North Carolina) MRC participated in a county-wide children's health fair, where they provided education and information on disaster preparedness, good hygiene, disease prevention, and the MRC.
- Nearly 6,000 MRC volunteers participated in outreach activities following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, with efforts that ranged from establishing medical needs shelters and serving medically fragile and other displaced people to staffing various response hotlines and teaching preparedness to community members. In addition, about 700 MRC volunteers were deployed outside their local jurisdiction on missions to the disaster-affected areas.
- Natrona County (Wyoming) MRC volunteers regularly provide respite care for firefighters by organizing and staffing a Firefighter Rehabilitation Trailer during wildfire and house fire calls, providing an ongoing community health service.

NSP MEMBERS STEP UP

With their emergency care and other health and safety skills, National Ski Patrol (NSP) members and Outdoor Emergency Care (OEC) technicians are well-placed to play an integral role in the variety of MRC activities. In recognition of this fact, at its midwinter meeting in January 2007 the NSP Board of Directors unanimously proclaimed its support for the Medical Reserve Corps and pledged to help foster the relationship between MRC and the NSP.

Currently, 200 NSP members have volunteered with local MRC units in a number of areas throughout the United States. The areas where NSP/MRC collaborations are particularly active are in the NSP Eastern, Central, and Far West Divisions. In addition, in Massachusetts, the Blandford Ski Patrol and the Greater Westfield & Western Hampden County MRC are working to strengthen the partnership between the two groups in order to better support emergency medical response in the region.

Furthermore, the ski patrol at Ski Catamount (on the New York-Massachusetts border) has invited the Berkshire (Massachusetts) MRC to give a presentation about the MRC in order to facilitate recruitment. These partnerships will eventually serve to strengthen localities and their ability to respond to public health events of any type or size.

ON A GROWTH TRACK

The MRC Program Office supports local efforts to establish, implement, and sustain MRC units nationwide. Its role is to help communities achieve their visions for public health and emergency preparedness and response, by providing national-level leadership and coordination, promoting awareness of the program, and enhancing capacity of the various units. The Medical Reserve Corps continues to grow as more people discover this resource to help the citizenry become healthier, stronger, and better prepared.

In light of the growth and increased recognition of the program, the U.S Congress included the MRC program in the “Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act,” which President Bush signed into law in December 2006. This act codifies the MRC as a federal program, and provides a deployment mechanism and legal protections for MRC members who become involved in a Federal emergency response.

However, even with this national-level recognition, MRC units remain as local support resources working to determine area-specific needs, managing their volunteers, and responding in the cities and counties where they live and work. Through these actions, each community is better served and prepared. As the MRC helps to strengthen the public health infrastructure and medical surge capabilities at the local level, each state—and the nation as a whole—is in turn strengthened.

Those interested in volunteering with a nearby MRC should visit the MRC website to find a unit near them. If no unit currently exists nearby, those interested are encouraged to talk to the leaders of the community partner organizations (e.g., public health, emergency management, hospitals, city government, etc.) to establish and integrate the MRC.

For more information about the MRC, visit the website (www.medicalreservcorps.gov) or contact the MRC Program Office (MRCcontact@hhs.gov or (301) 443-4951).

Marna Hoard, MPA, MPH, a lieutenant in the U.S. Public Health Service and serves as the program officer for outreach with the Medical Reserve Corps Program.

Robert J. Tosatto, RPh, MPH, MBA, is a captain in the U.S. Public Health Service and serves as the director of the Medical Reserve Corps Program.