



FALL 2007

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## 25 MRC Members Attended Disaster Preparedness and Response Training

*Twenty-Five MRC Members Attended the 2007 U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps Disaster Preparedness and Response Training at Camp Bullis, Texas.*

Over the course of 5 weeks in July and August, 25 MRC members voluntarily shipped out to participate in specialized training with the United States Public Health Service (USPHS). Braving temperatures that averaged a humid 90 degrees, blood-sucking mosquitoes, long hours, and MREs (also known as “Meals, Ready-to-Eat”), these MRC volunteers learned first-hand what a deployment following a public health emergency might entail.

Sponsored by the USPHS Office of Force Readiness and Deployment, the goal of the week-long training sessions at Camp Bullis, a United States Army camp located 17 miles northwest of San Antonio, was to facilitate functional training and communication. MRC members joined 680 uniformed USPHS officers in classroom lectures, hands-on exercises, obstacle courses, and team-building activities. Training culminated in a 12-hour Mass Casualty Incident Drill, which provided an intense opportunity for the MRC and USPHS to work together before an actual deployment.

Participants worked together to set up a functional field hospital.

“This was an excellent opportunity,” said Rodney Wann, Clinton County MRC (IN) Coordinator. “It was a bridge for the Federal and local level to get to know each other better.” Nancy Jones, RN, Erie Regional MRC (PA) Coordinator, thought that the training helped better define the roles each organization would play in a deployment and how these two groups could work together in a real event.

**“...training helped better define the roles each organization would play in a deployment...”**

After this experience, Wann emphasized that it isn’t just about writing plans, but knowing how to carry them out. “It’s one thing to have names on a list,” said Wann, “but it’s more important that they [volunteers] know the challenges.” Following this training, Wann is re-examining his MRC’s training program. “It needs to be more stringent and specific,” he said.

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Following morning roll call, MRC participants posed for a picture as they waited to pick up their MREs and head to class. Pictured left to right: Marlene Demers, Pelham MRC (NH); Theresa Dernbach, Natrona County MRC (WY); and Rodney Wann, Clinton County MRC (IN).



# National Notes

Dear MRC Leaders, Volunteers,  
and Colleagues,

Earlier this year, I submitted a plan for reorganizing the MRC Program Office to the Surgeon General and the Assistant Secretary of Health. This reorganization was proposed as a way for the MRC program to better support the efforts of MRC units throughout the nation and to begin to establish a federally-deployable cadre of volunteers within the MRC network.

In mid-September, I received confirmation that the MRC reorganization plan was approved! Our office is now officially called the “Office of the Civilian Volunteer Medical Reserve Corps,” and instead of being separated by several layers on the organizational chart, we now report directly to the Surgeon General. With this reorganization, I was given approval to hire four additional staff members. In addition, our request for an increase in budget has been included in the President’s FY 2008 budget, which is now in the hands of Congress.

This approval of the MRC reorganization acknowledges the phenomenal growth of the program, recognizes its “dual use” for both ongoing public health activities and emergency preparedness/response, and differentiates the functions of this civilian volunteer program from those of our previous organizational line. It also bears witness to the support and commitment for the MRC “network” from the Department of Health and Human Services, as well as the Administration.

All of the important work that we have been doing in the MRC Program Office (“local, local, local”) will continue. We will continue to support your local efforts to establish, implement, and sustain MRC units nationwide; provide national leadership and coordination of the MRC program; promote awareness and understanding of the critical role of MRCs in communities across the nation; and enhance the capacity of MRC units to achieve your local missions. We remain committed to the MRC concept and the support of strong, active local MRC units.

Now, however, we also will be in a better position to support efforts to organize and utilize willing, able, and approved MRC members in the case of a national emergency. I sincerely hope that this reorganization will not only help us to accomplish our mission, but will allow us to better help you to accomplish your goals and objectives.

As we work to accomplish our mission, we also must evaluate previous work to ensure we are on the right path. In recognition of this final issue in the inaugural year of **MRC★In Focus**, I request that you take a moment to complete the survey included with this edition. Your feedback on the quality and usefulness

of this newsletter will be greatly appreciated and will help us to improve the communication we have with you. We try very hard to support your efforts and share the best information and resources with you. I hope **MRC★In Focus** has been a positive addition to the materials we provide.

Finally, I would like to thank all of you for your involvement with the MRC. I am looking forward to the exciting changes and challenges that will come with our reorganization and to my continued work with all of you.

Warmest regards,

/CAPT Rob Tosatto/

CAPT Rob Tosatto  
Director  
Office of the Civilian Volunteer Medical Reserve Corps  
Office of the Surgeon General

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## Staff Profile

Lieutenant Joseph F. Zagame, III, Program Officer for Outreach of the Office of the Civilian Volunteer Medical Reserve Corps, is responsible for overseeing the coordination of MRC outreach activities. This includes developing activities to increase awareness of the program, encouraging the establishment of new MRC units, developing and maintaining relationships with stakeholders, and participating in partnership and coordination activities.

Prior to joining the MRC staff, LT Zagame served as Assistant Health Services Administrator at the Federal Bureau of Prisons, United States Penitentiary Lewisburg, in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. He was responsible for the overall management and direction of a healthcare team who provided medical care to an inmate population.

Formerly on active duty as an Aviation Technician with the United States Marine Corps and Marine Reserve, LT Zagame has been a Public Health Service (PHS) officer since 1997. He has been deployed several times with the PHS Commissioned Corps, including the Kosovar Refugee Health Clinic during “Operation Provide Refuge.”

LT Zagame holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Pharmacy with a minor in Psychology from Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science. ★

## ...Disaster Preparedness and Response Training...

The potential challenges of a deployment came to light during the Mass Casualty Incident Drill. The goal was to open a functional field hospital, triage, treat, and discharge “victims.” In a setting reminiscent of the TV show M\*A\*S\*H, participants worked together to set up communications and determine locations for a pharmacy and critical care area. While participants with clinical backgrounds worked to triage and treat lifelike mannequins whose vital signs were monitored by computer, non-medical participants coordinated the logistics of food, equipment, and transportation. “The drill showed what an incident would be like...utter chaos,” said Jones.

Following the demanding week of training in sometimes sub-par conditions, volunteers were recognized for their hard work in a graduation ceremony. Despite having to leave their jobs and families for a week, MRC members were grateful to have had this experience and to be able to bring what they learned back to their MRC unit. The lessons learned from the MRC’s participation in this training will be used by the Deployment Work Group to help create guidelines and training requirements for possible future volunteer deployment outside of an MRC’s local jurisdiction. ★



Training days were long with few breaks; participants used the little down time they had to rest.



Participants underwent a full-scale decontamination exercise during the 12-hour Mass Casualty Incident Drill.

## Helping Families in a Time of Crisis

A main artery was severed in the heart of Minnesota when the I-35W bridge collapsed as a busy rush hour neared an end on an unusually hot August evening. Shock and grief abounded as many wondered how such a tragedy could occur. Concerned families gathered as the missing were slowly accounted for.

Twenty-four MRC volunteers from the University of Minnesota (U of MN) MRC and the Scott County MRC responded following an immediate request for behavioral health volunteers by the city of Minneapolis. A family assistance center was set up near the site and remained open and staffed by MRC volunteers for 10 days. MRC volunteers met one-on-one with families and facilitated group sessions with first responders.

In addition to the mental health professionals, seven nurses and six physicians from the U of MN MRC provided medical assistance at the family assistance center. These health professionals wrote prescriptions, checked blood pressure, and conducted physical assessments of the family members of the missing.

This tragedy underscored the importance of psychological first aid training for MRC volunteers.

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## Public Health Preparedness Summit

February 19-22  
Atlanta, Georgia

2008

*Measuring Preparedness: Celebrating Our Success, Challenging Our Future*

Participate in the 2008 Public Health Preparedness Summit—the nation’s largest conference for public health and emergency preparedness professionals. The Public Health Preparedness Summit, to be held February 19–22 in Atlanta, Georgia, is the one opportunity for individuals nationwide to convene and learn about new methods of meeting preparedness challenges. Some of the topics to be covered include:

- Preparedness planning
- Current issues and hot topics in preparedness
- Communicating in a crisis
- Evaluating preparedness and response
- And many more!

Last year’s Summit was hailed as a significant national event bringing the public health preparedness community together to share resources, plan for the future, and help colleagues in their work nationwide. For more information about the Summit or to register, please visit

[www.phprep.org](http://www.phprep.org). ★



# MRC Units and Volunteers Nationwide Helped Recognize National Preparedness Month in September

## The West Texas MRC

The West Texas MRC participated in the “El Paso Community Heroes Celebration” held September 16, 2007. A police parade kicked off the event followed by an exhibition of more than 200 community organizations and resources at the El Paso Civic Center. The celebration, free and open to the public, also paid tribute to the events of 9/11 and recognized community heroes. The West Texas MRC displayed information and provided handouts about disaster preparedness. The MRC’s presence at this event, which drew an estimated 500 community members, led to several potential volunteers and numerous contacts with neighborhood associations and volunteer organizations for future community presentation opportunities.



MRC coordinator Paula Mitchell (right) speaks with a community member about the MRC. More than 200 community organizations and 500 residents participated in the El Paso Community Heroes Celebration.

## The Memphis and Shelby County Health Department MRC (TN)

The Memphis and Shelby County Health Department’s MRC teamed up with the Aging Commission of the Mid-South to recruit volunteers for the MRC. Five events, which included emergency preparedness presentations and recruitment sign-ups, were held during Active Aging Week, the last week in September. The MRC reached more than 300 people through these events, and new applications to join the MRC have been received daily.

## The Pearland Area MRC (TX)

In recognition of National Preparedness Month, the Pearland Area Citizens Corps-MRC (PACC-MRC), located in southeast Texas, purchased and donated five Automatic External Defibrillators (AEDs) to the City of Pearland. These devices are slated to be installed at the city’s City Hall complex, library, senior center, and events center. One AED will remain portable for city events. The PACC-MRC was able to provide the AEDs

thanks to the \$10,000 capacity building grant from the Office of the Civilian Volunteer Medical Reserve Corps.

## The Douglas County MRC (KS)

Working with other local agencies including the American Red Cross, the local volunteer center, and Douglas County Emergency Management among others, the Douglas County MRC helped organize the “Douglas County Preparedness Fair.” The fair was a community-wide event to educate citizens about emergency preparedness and help them become prepared for natural and man-made emergencies. Held at the local visitor’s center, more than 150 community members turned out for the event. Four MRC volunteers helped with demonstrations including the proper hand washing technique and a display of an emergency stockpile to illustrate which type and quantity of supplies a family of four should have on hand in the event of an emergency.



More than 150 community members attended the Douglas County Preparedness Fair—a community-wide event to educate citizens about emergency preparedness.

## The Gateway District MRC (KY)

During September, MRC volunteer and registered pharmacist Bobbi Oneal, PPh, PharmD, distributed preparedness information including information about making a disaster plan to each patient who received a prescription. As many as 600 community members received this information, which was provided by Kentucky Homeland Security, with their prescription. Ms. Oneal also worked with the human resource department of the healthcare system her pharmacy is part of to distribute preparedness information to all 200 employees in their paycheck on the first of September.

## The Northeast Texas MRC

The Northeast Texas MRC utilized local media to get the word out about preparedness. To kick off preparedness month, the MRC coordinator and the county Public Health Preparedness Coordinator appeared on the local NBC television affiliate and

showcased the MRC’s “Go Kit.” Additionally, the MRC developed a radio public service announcement (PSA) geared toward family preparedness. Throughout the month, the PSA aired approximately 36 times on five radio stations that reach six counties. At the end of the month, the MRC exhibited at the East Texas State Fair. At the fair, the MRC held a drawing each day for an MRC “Go Kit.” The MRC also gave away emergency contact refrigerator magnets and pocket-size first aid kits. It was estimated that 12,000 people attended the exhibit, and at least 50 people were interested in volunteering with the MRC.



The Northeast Texas MRC’s exhibit booth drew more than 12,000 people during the week-long East Texas State Fair.

### The Moore County MRC (NC)

In partnership with the local Humane Society, the Moore County MRC participated in four events throughout the month—rabies clinics, a dog show,

and the Moore Humane Society’s “Walking and Wagging Dog Walk-a-Thon and Festival”—to educate approximately 200 community members about family and pet preparedness. In addition to pet preparedness information, the Moore County MRC also helped raise awareness about the MRC in their community.

### The Westchester County Emergency Volunteer Reserves MRC (NY)

To kick off National Preparedness month, 50 members of the Westchester County Emergency Volunteer Reserves MRC participated in a mock drill. During the first deployment drill for the team, volunteers practiced working within the Incident Command System structure, using the emergency notification system, setting up a triage area, and providing basic medical care—key skills volunteers would need in a major emergency. The drill was deemed a success and was the first in a series of exercises planned for the unit. ★



Westchester County MRC volunteers triaged a “victim” during a mock drill to kick off preparedness month.

## SAVE the DATE!

### 6th Annual Medical Reserve Corps National Leadership and Training Conference

Hilton Portland and Executive Tower  
April 8–11, 2008 • Portland, Oregon

The Sixth Annual Medical Reserve Corps National Leadership and Training Conference will be held April 8–11, 2008, at the Hilton Portland and Executive Tower. Join national government and nongovernmental organizations, emergency response and public health experts, and other community volunteer organizations for this 4-day knowledge-sharing conference. Agenda items will include an array of topics in response to community requests for both the seasoned and newly developed MRC communities. This conference is an ideal meet-and-greet opportunity for local MRC leaders to share best practices and strategies. Hands-on concurrent sessions will provide the “how to” on many subjects including:



Located 50 miles outside of Portland, Mt. Hood—Oregon’s most recently active volcano—towers above the city’s skyline.

- Partnerships
- Volunteer Management and Engagement
- MRC Resources
- Sustainability and Funding
- Operations
- Training
- Media and Communications
- Liability and Workman’s Compensation
- Preparedness Planning and Exercises
- Special Needs

Stay tuned for more information on this exciting event! ★



# Legislative Update

October 3, 2007, Yvonne Madlock, Director of the Memphis and Shelby County Tennessee Health Department, testified on pandemic flu preparedness before the Senate Subcommittee on State, Local, and Private Sector Preparedness and Integration. Madlock discussed the new partnerships that have been developed and strengthened as a result of pandemic flu preparedness. Madlock also spoke of her county's Medical Reserve Corps—2,700 volunteers strong—and the importance of such a local resource in the event of a pandemic or other emergency. Copies of the written testimony are available at: <http://www.naccho.org/press/testimony/index.cfm>. ★

## MRC Spotlights

### Volunteer Spotlight

With a population of less than 55,000 in an area almost twice the size of Rhode Island, Oxford County, Maine is a rural community with varied needs and issues. Kevin Saisi, the coordinator of the Oxford County MRC, has worked diligently to ensure this rural community's needs would be met in the event of a major emergency.

As a substance abuse counselor and part-time EMT, he has networked tenaciously with various agencies and other potential partners for support. As a result, the Oxford County MRC is being transformed into a multi-functional MRC comprised of multiple teams—Hospital, EMS, Public Health, Mental Health, and Case Management—to handle a public health response in the community.

### Unit Spotlight

The Dane County MRC (WI) is unique in that it consists only of mental health professionals. This quarter's unit in the spotlight has just 30 volunteers, all of whom are mental health professionals trained to assist the community during a crisis.

The realization that there was a need for a mental health response team in Dane County arose when, in 1993, at least 69 people were injured in a stampede at a University of Wisconsin–Madison football game. This incident served as a catalyst for the development of the MRC Dane County has today.

The Dane County MRC is well integrated into the community. Housed in a Citizen Corps Council, the unit also works closely with the local emergency management agency. The unit's volunteer members are very active; the unit holds monthly meetings, is currently developing an operational

plan, and is assessing its core competencies for volunteers.

### Organization Spotlight

From increased asthma to melanoma to the medical challenges posed by storms such as Hurricane Katrina, weather challenges the medical community's capacity and response. The organization spotlight is on the National Weather Service (NWS). Part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency (NOAA), NWS/NOAA is engaged in a new initiative to increase the understanding of the connection between weather and health.

The NWS/NOAA effort assists the health sector's ability to use forecast information to add or reduce staff, make decisions to evacuate critical patients before losing power, and improve preparation and response to weather events. Public services to assist healthcare providers are available from NOAA's local Weather Forecast Offices nationwide. ★

## Holiday Food Safety

As the holidays approach, it's a good time to think about good food safety practices. The following are a few basic food safety tips to help reduce the risk of foodborne illness:

- **Party Preparation:** Bacteria can spread rapidly through the kitchen. Make sure to scrub your hands, contact surfaces, and utensils with warm water and soap.
- **Don't Cross Contaminate:** Do not allow bacteria to co-mingle; keep all raw meats and their juices away from each other.
- **Danger Zone:** This is the temperature range (41° F – 140° F) at which the most bacteria can grow. Food should not be out of this range for more than 2 hours.
- **Keep Hot Food Hot and Cold Food Cold:** Improper

temperatures can allow bacteria to grow quickly. Hot foods should be 140° F. Cook all foods to safe internal temperatures; use a meat thermometer if possible. Cold foods and refrigerators should be kept at 40° F and freezers at 0° F.

For more information, visit the United States Department of Agriculture Web site at: [www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact\\_Sheets/Seasonal\\_Food\\_Safety\\_Fact\\_Sheets/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact_Sheets/Seasonal_Food_Safety_Fact_Sheets/index.asp). ★

### Have questions?

Call the USDA  
Meat & Poultry Hotline:  
1-888-MPHotline  
1-888-674-6854  
Or send an e-mail to:  
[mp hotline.fsis@usda.gov](mailto:mp hotline.fsis@usda.gov)



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## Helping Families...

“Psychological first aid is key,” said Kathy Berlin, U of MN MRC Coordinator. “Behavioral health will be involved in every response. We will always have families and responders who need debriefings.” All seven MRCs in the Twin Cities metropolitan area offer a basic psychological first aid course. The U of MN MRC is unique in that it has its own team, the Mental Health Crisis Response Team, within the MRC comprised of behavioral health professionals.

Since the event, there has been an increased interest by both U of MN and Scott County MRC volunteers in psychological first aid. The U of MN MRC is opening its Mental Health Crisis Response Team to non-behavioral health professionals. To be part of this team, volunteers must complete a 1-day training on psychological first aid. Volunteers also can elect to take a 2-day training to become certified in trauma response. The U of MN MRC hopes to eventually provide psychological first aid training to all of its nearly 1,000 members. ★



First responders at the scene of the I-35W bridge collapse.

Photo by Noah Kunin  
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>

## Suggested psychological first aid resources and trainings for MRC members include:

Psychological First Aid: Field Operations Guide (MRC version)  
[www.medicalreservecorps.gov/file/MRC\\_resources/MRC\\_PFA.doc](http://www.medicalreservecorps.gov/file/MRC_resources/MRC_PFA.doc)

Psychological First Aid: Helping People Cope During Disasters and Public Health Emergencies [www.centerfordisastermedicine.org/disaster\\_mental\\_health.html](http://www.centerfordisastermedicine.org/disaster_mental_health.html)

Introduction to Mental Health Preparedness for Local Health Department Staff and Community Volunteers [http://nccphp.sph.unc.edu/mental\\_health\\_prep/](http://nccphp.sph.unc.edu/mental_health_prep/)

Psychological First Aid: The Role of MRC Volunteers in Disaster Response (Webinar) <http://webcasts.naccho.org/series.php?id=225>

### We Want to Hear From You!

We need your help to make this newsletter informative, interesting, and beneficial to MRC units nationwide. Share news, ideas, interesting stories, and best practices, or tell us about outstanding volunteers.

### Submittal Guidelines:

- Please include contact information (e-mail and telephone number) for followup.
- If you include photos, please send as a high-resolution JPEG, TIF, or EPS attachment.
- Digital cameras should be set for a high-quality image using the maximum megapixel setting available.
- Photo submissions also should include a caption or description of the event.

E-mail us at: [MRCnewsletter@naccho.org](mailto:MRCnewsletter@naccho.org)

## ★★★ A Look Ahead ★★★

### December

- 1 World Aids Day  
[www.unaids.org/en/default.asp](http://www.unaids.org/en/default.asp)
- 5 Emergency Management Assistant Compact (Webcast)  
[www.adph.org/alphtn](http://www.adph.org/alphtn)
- 6 Mass Antibiotic Dispensing: Taking Care of Business (Webcast)  
<http://www2a.cdc.gov/PHTN//calendar.asp>
- 12 The National Terrorism Preparedness Institute “Live Response” (Webcast)  
<http://terrorism.spcollege.edu>
- 13 Surveillance of Vaccine-Preventable Diseases (Webcast)  
<http://www2a.cdc.gov/PHTN//calendar.asp>

### January

#### HAPPY NEW YEAR!

National Blood Donor Awareness Month  
[www.aabb.org](http://www.aabb.org)

National Glaucoma Awareness Month  
[www.preventblindness.org](http://www.preventblindness.org)

### February

American Heart Month  
[www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)

- 1 National Wear Red Day  
[www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/hearttruth/](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/hearttruth/)
  - 2 National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness and Information Day  
[www.blackaidsday.org](http://www.blackaidsday.org)
- 19–22 2008 Public Health Preparedness Summit  
[www.phprep.org](http://www.phprep.org)





# MRC★ In Focus

Volunteers Building Strong, Healthy, and Prepared Communities

[www.medicalreservecorps.gov](http://www.medicalreservecorps.gov)



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- ## And Much More...



### Connect with MRC Leaders Nationwide: Join the Two-Way Listserv

Do you have an MRC-related question, but aren't sure who might know the answer? The two-way MRC Listserv offers those active in the program a way to share ideas, resources, best practices, and lessons learned. This listserv is conversational and allows for great interaction between units, the Office of the Civilian Volunteer Medical Reserve Corps, and others involved in the program.

Sign up today! Simply visit <http://www.medicalreservecorps.gov/MRCListservs> and click on [MRCLeaders-1 Rules and Regulations](#). ★



**NACCHO**  
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