



Guide to Engaging Your MRC Volunteers: Community Preparedness

A Guide for Local MRC Units



Guide to Engaging Your MRC Volunteers: Community Preparedness

Background

Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) volunteers who are primarily utilized in emergencies may lose interest during the periods between emergency activations. This can cause a “revolving door” effect in which the unit loses seasoned volunteers as fast as it recruits new volunteers. To resolve this issue, many MRC units use volunteers in ongoing community preparedness education and outreach efforts.

What are the Benefits of MRC Unit Participation in Community Preparedness Efforts?

Before participating in community preparedness efforts, your MRC unit must establish a mission to guide its activities. Ensure that your mission is focused enough to remain within the limits of the available resources. Maintain a balance between the efforts that address your unit’s focus and those that expand the unit’s relevance to the community. To accomplish this, consider the MRC from three perspectives: emergency preparedness, emergency response, and public health. Although your MRC unit may focus on one perspective, your community may have needs that are related to all three. Addressing these perspectives can help your MRC participate in the life of your community and stay connected to its routine requirements. In addition, preparing the community for emergencies can mitigate an emergency’s effects on the community’s health.

One approach to adopting a diversified view of your MRC unit’s activities is to determine ways that your unit can supplement existing preparedness, medical, or health projects. Rather than creating new programs from scratch, seek community preparedness initiatives that existed in your community prior to the formation of your MRC. Look for initiatives that:

- Help meet crucial community needs
- Improve community preparedness for emergencies
- Help demonstrate responsiveness to community needs, resulting in an enhanced public perception of the MRC
- Allow your MRC to benefit from resources earmarked for these initiatives

How can MRC Units Better Prepare Their Communities?

A community is only as prepared as its citizens. Many MRC units are creating a culture of preparedness in their communities by conducting the following activities:

- Safety and preparedness expositions or exhibits at health fairs and other events
- Informational sessions with emergency management professionals
- Press briefings and other public information efforts to disseminate preparedness information

-
- Dispensing clinic exercises
 - “Family First” planning
 - Personal preparedness education

September is National Preparedness Month, an ideal time to involve your MRC unit in community preparedness activities. Visit <http://www.ready.gov> for more information on community and family preparedness and National Preparedness Month activities.

MRC unit activities help establish the MRC as an important part of the community’s shared vision for public health and emergency response. Help others in the community understand how the MRC unit’s activities make their homes, workplaces, and neighborhoods safer, healthier, and better prepared.

Community Preparedness Checklist

- Include community preparedness in the mission of your MRC unit.
- Seek existing community preparedness activities within your community and incorporate MRC volunteers into these activities.
- Ensure that your MRC volunteers have their own family response plan.
- Develop a calendar of preparedness events that MRC volunteers can participate in during the year.
- Use National Preparedness Month to promote both the MRC unit in your community and the importance of preparedness.

Additional Resources

Information on community and family preparedness and National Preparedness Month activities:

<http://www.ready.gov/america/>

Pandemic Flu Planning checklist for individuals and families:

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/individual/checklist.html>

Documentation of MRC Volunteer’s Family Preparedness—developed by the DeKalb County Board of Health MRC (IL):

http://www.medicalreservecorps.gov/File/Promising_Practices_Toolkit/Rules_Regulations_Releases/Documentation_Family_Preparedness/DeKalbCountyMRC.doc (162 KB)

The Family First Safety Plan—a family preparedness plan template developed by the Maine Township Regional MRC (IL):

http://www.medicalreservecorps.gov/File/Promising_Practices_Toolkit/Rules_Regulations_Releases/Documentation_Family_Preparedness/MaineTownshipRegionalMRC.doc (1,151 KB)

Community Preparedness Events Held by Local MRC Units

- The **Hatch High School Junior MRC (NM)** unit verified the school's fire safety plans and performed a safety check of the fire extinguishers, emergency showers, and eyewash stations in the school.
- The **City of Orlando MRC (FL)** unit partnered with the American Red Cross, Citizen Corps, and other local partners to provide Mission Possible: A Community Prepared to the local community. This is a free event featuring five 20-minute interactive presentations aimed at helping individuals and families prepare for a disaster.
- The **Woodford County MRC (KY)** unit partnered with the American Red Cross to present the "Be Red Cross Ready" preparedness program in elementary schools. Volunteers were trained by the Red Cross to present this course. The program is adaptable for different age groups and includes the following topics: Making a Family Plan, Building a Kit, and Basic First Aid.