



# MRC ★ In Touch

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## Featured Article

### Washoe MRC Responds to Deadly Air Show Disaster

On September 16, 2011, the third deadliest air show disaster in U.S. history occurred at the Reno Air Show in Reno, Nevada. One of the planes crashed into the box seat area, killing 11 people including the pilot, and injuring dozens of spectators who were sent to four local hospitals for care.

The next morning, Washoe MRC coordinator, Betsy Hambleton, received a call informing her that a Family Assistance Center (FAC) was activated and that Washoe MRC volunteers would be needed to help both at the crash scene and at the FAC. Hambleton received this request from the Public Health Emergency Response Coordinator, Christina Conti, who was in charge of the FAC and received the request from the medical examiner's office, which discovered the extent of the recovery effort needed at the disaster scene early Saturday morning.

Initially, four registered nurses (RNs) were requested to walk the tarmac with National Transportation and Safety Board Personnel and act as scribes for these officials. Hambleton was also asked to provide ten mental health counselors with trauma and crisis counseling experience to help survivors and victims' families cope with the tragedy.

By 9:30 Saturday morning, four MRC volunteers were deployed to work the tarmac at the crash site. Hambleton deployed two couples who had experience as either emergency medical technicians or RNs with intensive care unit, burn unit, emergency room, flight nursing, and scribing experience. Upon checking in at the Reno/Stead Airport with medical examiner's staff, the MRC volunteers quickly discovered that the original plan of scribing for officials turned into a very different assignment—now including recovering the remains of the deceased who were scattered throughout the debris field on the tarmac.

Hambleton said, "It was a difficult day for these volunteers, but they never complained. They combed through the debris field amid the shattered wreckage, jet fuel fumes, and other odors that permeated the crash site, and helped collect remains that enabled the coroner's office to positively identify several of the deceased." The MRC volunteers selected for this task had extensive experience with trauma but she had also purposely selected married couples so they could debrief with one another, even after she offered follow-up mental health services to them.

During this time, Hambleton was working with another MRC volunteer, Jodi Ussher, a licensed clinical social worker, to recruit, screen, and provide background checks on six new MRC mental health volunteers to assist with crisis counseling at the FAC. Hambleton noted that this was initially the biggest challenge—to contact volunteers with trauma and crisis counseling experience to staff the FAC, as well as another team to work with the medical examiner's office at the crash scene, all in a timely manner.

However, with the help of Ussher and the use of the Nevada Licensing Board posts licensing information online, it was an easier process for Hambleton to check the licenses of the new MRC recruits.

Around 8:00 PM on Saturday evening, Hambleton was asked by an FAC organizer to find 20 additional nurses by Sunday morning to assist the coroner's office with inputting medical data into the Unified Victim Identification System, which gathers key information from the 211 call center, as well as data gathered on the tarmac that has been processed by the Coroner's forensics team. This data is then compared to the data received from the post mortem findings to facilitate the identification process.

According to Hambleton, "We needed to use this system to help identify the missing because of the nature of the crash and the situation in the debris field out on the tarmac."

At the FAC, ten MRC mental health volunteers staffed the FAC and provided crisis counseling. On Sunday morning, as Hambleton returned to the office to begin the recruiting process for 20 new nurses, she received a call from the FAC to start the process of stepping down the operations because they were preparing to demobilize the FAC by Monday.

The FAC served 17 families and provided crisis counseling, hotel rooms, and a free rental car for a family who had multiple family members at different hospitals. The Washoe County MRC provided 20 total volunteers, which included 10 mental health counselors and 10 medical team members.

Hambleton says, "On a more personal note I would just like to add that the people we served—the families of those who were lost—showed incredible strength, and I believe they are a unique group of people whose enthusiasm for the Air Races is rooted more in their collective sentiment for the classic American war planes and all they symbolize than it is in competitive time trials." She notes that the Washoe MRC volunteers amazed her because they were all "so professional and understood the gravity of the situation and even though the objectives changed throughout the day, the volunteers rose to the challenge and surpassed my expectations."

She also adds that the professionalism of county health officials in coordinating the FAC and other agencies was very impressive. Going forward, the Washoe MRC will develop a program with the medical examiner's office to create a team of approximately 20 volunteers to respond to mass fatality/mass casualty incidents.

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## MRC/NACCHO Connections

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### **Model Practice Program Accepting Submissions**

NACCHO's Model Practices Program honors and recognizes outstanding local health practices from across the nation and shares and promotes these practices among local health departments (LHDs). Model and promising practices cut across all areas of local public health, including, but not limited to, community health, environmental health, emergency preparedness, infrastructure, governmental public health, and chronic disease.

Once practices are designated as model or promising, they are stored in the Model Practices Database so all LHDs can benefit from them. NACCHO began accepting Model Practices submissions in 2003. Since then, NACCHO has placed numerous model and promising practices in the searchable online Model Practice Database

with more added each year.

If you have any questions or would like to know more about NACCHO's Model Practices Program, please e-mail [practices@naccho.org](mailto:practices@naccho.org) and a member of NACCHO's membership team will respond.

## Announcements

### 2011–2012 MRC CBA Update

Submitted Capacity Building Award (CBA) applications are currently being reviewed. Awardees will be notified in December 2011.

If you have any questions related to your CBA application, please e-mail [mrc@naccho.org](mailto:mrc@naccho.org).

### National Academies of Sciences Research on Health Impact Assessments

A report has been released from the National Academies of Sciences on health impact assessments (HIA). A HIA is intended to inform decisions and shape proposals so that adverse health effects are minimized and potential health benefits are optimized. The committee recommended a six-step framework for HIA which includes screening, scoping, assessment, recommendations, reporting, monitoring, and evaluation. The descriptions can be found in the full report or the four-page summary which can be found here at the below link.

<http://dels.nas.edu/Materials/Report-In-Brief/4318-Health-Impact-Assessment>

### November: MRC Family Album

In honor of the ongoing countdown to the 10th anniversary of the MRC, NACCHO is encouraging MRC units to engage in events each month.

In November, contribute to the "MRC Family Album" and submit one photo of your MRC in action. Videos also encouraged. Please submit the photo and/or video to [mrc@naccho.org](mailto:mrc@naccho.org). Please title the subject line "MRC Family Album."

### Register for the 2012 Public Health Preparedness Summit

The 8th Annual Public Health Preparedness Summit will be held from Tuesday, February 21, 2012 to Friday, February 24, 2012 in Anaheim, CA. The goal of the Summit is to strengthen and enhance the capabilities of public health professionals and other participants to plan and prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters and other public health emergencies. Register today for the early bird rate!

[http://www.phprep.org/2012/register/Eweb.naccho.org/eweb/DynamicPage.aspx?WebCode=proddetailadd&ivd\\_prc\\_prd\\_key=4cc37b44-0e8d-4c94-aad0-1057ca1d3d81](http://www.phprep.org/2012/register/Eweb.naccho.org/eweb/DynamicPage.aspx?WebCode=proddetailadd&ivd_prc_prd_key=4cc37b44-0e8d-4c94-aad0-1057ca1d3d81)

To submit information for either MRC: In Touch or MRC: In Focus, please contact Megan Skupien at [mskupien@naccho.org](mailto:mskupien@naccho.org) or (202)783-1376.



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