



MRC ★ In Touch

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Featured Article

F-3 Tornadoes Devastate Communities, MRC Units Step in and Respond

"I've never seen anything like it before...there were houses on top of cars...people were absolutely stunned...traumatized and walked around with a vacant, shocked look in their eyes." These are the words of Kathleen Conley Norbut, M.Ed., LMHC, describing the aftermath of F-3 tornadoes that touched down in western and central Massachusetts in the late afternoon of June 1, 2011. Conley Norbut is the MRC coordinator of western Massachusetts, a region that geographically encompasses more than 30 percent of the state.

Conley Norbut was out-of-state when she received a phone call from a hysterical friend telling her that the town of Monson was devastated. At the time, she was also serving as the emergency management director for the community and immediately recommended the appointment of an acting emergency management director for the town. Conley Norbut says she, "had to think of my role through a different lens as I was out-of-state. I started e-mails and calls, and put the continuity of operations plan (COOP) into place and contacted Michael Nelson, MRC coordinator for the neighboring Hampshire County, to coordinate the MRC volunteer deployment, and sent e-mails to unit coordinators to request volunteers—there was no stand-by notice."

She comments that when a catastrophe hits your region and your infrastructure is destroyed, you have to think of how you can reach people because communication is wiped out. Conley Norbut credits her being out-of-state for being able to communicate—if she had been in town, she would have had no way of communicating because the tornadoes destroyed the municipal office building that housed the emergency operations center, radio antennas, and the nearby cell tower. With communications and the emergency operation center compromised, Conley Norbut says, "The wounded were caring for the injured...whatever resources you have or don't have at the moment is what you have to work with."

MRC volunteers were deployed from up to 90 miles away and included people from the 17 western Massachusetts units, and central, northeast, and southeast Massachusetts MRC units. The MRC volunteers staffed three nearby shelters. For some volunteers, this was their first time in a shelter; therefore, just-in-time trainings were provided. The MRC staffed shelters in Springfield and West Springfield around the clock with three shifts for 30 days. Using the COOP, Conley Norbut surrendered her position as the MRC regional coordinator and filled the role of the MRC town coordinator, who was also out-of-state during the initial days of the response.

By days five and six, Conley Norbut notes that people were on edge and were exhausted—they wanted "comfort, answers, and their life back." A resource center was opened and staffed with MRC volunteers who also donated office supplies and equipment. After 10 days, she turned the resource center over to the returning town of Monson MRC unit coordinator, Liz Manley. Conley Norbut then

returned to regional operations to assist MRC coordinators, public health directors, and emergency preparedness planners in the ongoing challenges of managing volunteers and supplies to help survivors piece their lives back together.

Although people were overworked, stressed, and emotionally and physically exhausted, people were overall, very respectful. During the MRC debriefing, a volunteer observed that she witnessed, "rival gang members helping to setup cots...people overcame their differences."

July 1, 2011, was the last day of deployment to staffing shelters. Today, Monson and more than a dozen communities in the region still look like a war zone; however, the sounds of chainsaws tearing through debris have begun to die down. Now, the sounds of hammers and nails working to rebuild the communities can be heard echoing in the valley.

MRC/NACCHO Connections

Preparedness Starts With You!

September is National Preparedness Month. Emergencies and disasters can happen anytime, anywhere and they happen every day. It is almost impossible to turn on the news without hearing about a disaster or emergency taking place in a community...a community just like yours. It is important for you to take some time this September to prepare yourself, those you care about, and your community for these unexpected events.

As FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate reminds us, "Individuals and families are the most important members of the nation's emergency management team. Being prepared can save precious time if there is a need to respond to an emergency."

Begin by making a plan and basic kits for your home, car, and workplace in the event you or your family must go for several days without electricity, water, gas, and other public utilities and services. Remember that access to supermarkets, banks, or other local services may not be possible in a widespread disaster.

Follow these three steps: Get a Kit. Make a Plan. Be informed. The difference between being a victim or a survivor is being prepared!

For information on creating emergency kits, preparing an emergency plan, and other free resources, visit <http://www.Ready.gov> or for a month by month preparedness plan, visit <http://www.do1thing.com>.

Announcements

CBA's Available for 2011–2012

Please note that funding for the CBA's is contingent upon funding from the government.

The Office of the Surgeon General (OSG), Office of the Civilian Volunteer Medical Reserve Corps (OCVMRC) and the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) are pleased to announce the availability of Capacity Building Awards (CBAs) for the 2011–2012 funding year in the amount of \$5,000 per award.

In order to be eligible for the CBA, the MRC unit must be registered

with the OCVMRC as of August 5, 2011 (pending units in the process of registration must have applied by August 7, 2011); have FULLY updated their unit profile on <http://www.medicalreservecorps.gov> between June 1 and September 15, 2011, in accordance with OCVMRC profile update requirements; and be eligible to receive federal funds through the sponsoring/housing agency or 501(c)3 non-profit.

Applications open on August 8, 2011 and will close on September 15, 2011 at 5 PM, EDT.

Visit <http://www.naccho.org/topics/emergency/MRC/CBA.cfm> for complete application information including application documents, FAQs, and other guidance. If you have questions, please contact mrc@naccho.org.

September is 2011 National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month

September is 2011 National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month, which was started in 2010 to draw public attention to this growing epidemic.

There are more than 23 million children and teenagers in the U.S. are obese or overweight. MRC units can be the catalyst and work with community partners to spread the word about this important issue.

The 2011 toolkit can be found at <http://www.healthierkidsbrighterfutures.org/toolkit.pdf> and more information can be found at <http://www.healthierkidsbrighterfutures.org>.

Abstract Deadline Extended for the 2012 Public Health Preparedness Summit

Contribute your knowledge to the leading forum for public health preparedness practitioners by submitting an abstract to the 2012 Public Health Preparedness Summit. The Summit will be held in Anaheim, California during February 21–24, 2012.

All abstract submissions must be submitted electronically through the Summit's online abstract submission system.

The abstract submission deadline is August 31, 2011, 11:59 PM, EDT.
<http://www.phprep.org/2012/agenda/abstracts.cfm>

NLM Announces New Funding Opportunity

The National Library of Medicine (NLM) announces a new funding opportunity for small pilot projects to improve access to disaster medicine and public health information for healthcare professionals, first responders and others that play a role in health-related disaster preparedness, response and recovery.

NLM is soliciting proposals from partnerships that include at least one library and at least one non-library organization that has disaster-related responsibilities, such as a hospital, volunteer organization, public health department, public safety department, fire/rescue, or other local, regional or state agency. NLM encourages submission of innovative proposals that enhance mutually beneficial collaboration among libraries and disaster-related agencies. For example, projects may increase awareness of health information resources, demonstrate how libraries and librarians can assist planners and responders with disaster-related information needs,

show ways in which disaster workers can educate librarians about disaster management, and/or include collaboration among partners in developing information resources that support planning and response to public health emergencies.

Contract awards will be offered for a minimum of \$15,000 to a maximum of \$30,000 each for a one-year project.

The deadline for proposals is Wednesday, August 31, 2011. Proposals are limited to six pages plus supplemental materials such as resumes, letters of support, and a budget.

For more information and instructions about the "Disaster Health Information Outreach and Collaboration Project 2011" (NLM-011-130-KDB), please visit the link below.

<http://disasterinfo.nlm.nih.gov/dimrc/2011disasteroutreachrfq.html>

PHSSR Research Agenda

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are developing a research agenda for the field of public health systems and services research (PHSSR). PHSSR is a field of study that examines the organization, financing, and delivery of public health services within communities and the impact of these services on public health.

A draft research agenda has been developed, and RWJF and CDC are seeking input on this agenda. It is important for them to hear the voices of public health practitioners.

Please visit the link below to review the research agenda and to vote for the research topics you think will most benefit local public health practice. Feedback is being accepted through the end of August.

<http://phssragenda.ideascale.com>

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



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