



MRC In Touch

Volunteers Building Strong, Healthy, and Prepared Communities

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Featured Article

New Lenox MRC Trains Volunteers in Disaster Psychology

On February 18, the Village of New Lenox MRC (IL) partnered with the local high school drama department to create a mock gas explosion scenario to train volunteers on disaster psychology. Twelve high school students, decorated with theatrical makeup, acted as victims on a field trip of the village hall when the explosion occurred.

The event began with a brief overview of disaster psychology using the CERT curriculum. MRC volunteers were split into three groups in different parts of the building. The students were encouraged to play a myriad of roles so MRC volunteers could gain experience with different reactions during a high stress response. Some students were loud and hysterical, while others mimicked victims who were in shock. The volunteers were told to medically triage the patients, but spent the majority of the exercise focusing on disaster psychology.

After the 20-minute role playing exercise, MRC volunteers went through a debriefing session with the whole team. "The realism of the exercise struck home with a lot of the volunteers," said unit leader Dan Martin. Participants also expressed how helpful it was to bring the disaster psychology lessons to life. They noted there were several key takeaways from the event, including which verbal interactions had a positive effect, when to separate victims, and how to monitor first responder exhaustion.

MRC/NACCHO Connections

NACCHO Funds 43 Innovative Community Projects through MRC Challenge Award

NACCHO, in partnership with the Division of Civilian Volunteer Medical Reserve Corps (DCVMRC), has selected 43 Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) units to receive 2014-2015 NACCHO MRC Challenge Awards. More than 175 MRC units across the country applied for the award. After a competitive two-tiered review process, NACCHO selected 43 MRC units to receive the award. The selected units were awarded \$15,000 each, totaling \$645,000 distributed through the program.

The Challenge Award aims to focus innovation in areas that are aligned with national health initiatives that are also significant at the local level. MRC units could propose projects that employ a number of approaches, such as educational programs, formation of unique partnerships, community outreach, and creation of innovative tools or systems. Unit leaders were also encouraged to use this opportunity to evaluate their programs and translate the processes and outcomes through research.

Beginning in spring 2015, the Challenge Awards will fund projects that benefit local communities in one of four focus areas: Disaster Risk Reduction, Chronic Disease Prevention, Partners for Empowered Communities, and Mental and Emotional Wellbeing. Each of this year's Challenge Award winners will document their project's processes, successes, and lessons learned on [NACCHO's MRC Awards website](#).

[See the full list of Challenge awardees and their projects.](#)

Announcements

NACCHO Study Examines Local Role in Large-Scale Chemical Incident Response

NACCHO, in collaboration with the Department of Homeland Security Office of Health Affairs, Chemical Defense Program, has initiated an effort to understand the role local health departments play in responding to large-scale chemical incidents. As part of that effort, NACCHO last month hosted a one-day focus group with local health departments and community response representatives in the Washington, D.C. area, as well as representatives from state and federal agencies and nonprofits.

The study defines large-scale chemical incidents as a sudden event, whether accidental, an act of terrorism or of natural forces, that results in an acute onset of symptoms that could overwhelm local response capacity and resources. Incidents of this type include the 1995 Tokyo subway sarin attack, and the 2005 train crash in Graniteville, SC. NACCHO's study in particular examines the local health department role during the initial 6-12 hours after an incident.

The study addresses a number of questions, including:

- From a basic, intermediate, and advanced perspective, what capabilities and recommendations can be offered to local health departments involved in a chemical incident response?
- How do local health departments perceive their role in responding to a high-consequence or a large scale chemical incident, and what is the basis for that perception?
- What barriers exist between local authorities (law enforcement, fire, EMS, hospitals, environmental health officials, etc.) in chemical incident response?
- How can local public health help with the reduction of chemical hazard vulnerability?

Focus group participants identified a number of local health department needs, including routine meetings and interactions that allow health department staff to integrate into the community; formalized relationships across organizations; and general primers of necessary information and frequently asked questions related to the specific incident. Participants also emphasized the need to think of public health as a system instead of a department, otherwise critical partners such as volunteer groups, environmental health and healthcare might be excluded from response planning activities. [Read more about the results.](#)

NACCHO will analyze the results of the focus group in order to develop a report for stakeholder dissemination, and identify next steps and future activities that help ensure local health departments and their partners are prepared to address large-scale chemical incidents.

Coordinated Response to Flooding and the Mudslide in Washington State: An Interview with Therese Quinn

This is part of a series of interviews with local health department staff who will present at the 2015 Preparedness Summit. Therese Quinn, Medical Reserve Corps Coordinator, Snohomish Health District, previews her session, "Coordinated Response to Washington State Route 530 Flooding and Slide in Washington State." At this session, Therese will be joined by John E. Pennington, Director, Snohomish County Department of Emergency Management.

Q: Thank you for agreeing to speak with us about your learning session at the 2015 Preparedness Summit. Can you give a brief overview of what your session will cover?

Our session will highlight how public health, emergency management, and the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) worked together to coordinate the response to the 2014 flooding and mudslide in Washington state. John Pennington will be leading the presentation and will provide an overview of what occurred, as well as discuss the role Snohomish County Department of Emergency Management played throughout the response. This session will also demonstrate how the Snohomish Health District and the MRC unit worked in cooperation with other agencies, such as emergency management, to respond to the event.

Q: Who were the critical participants and partners involved in this coordinated response (other than emergency management, public health, and the MRC)?

Almost 350 agencies were involved in the response, however, the MRC did not work closely with all of them. Besides coordinating with local emergency management and public health, the MRC staff and volunteers worked directly with a number of local partners, as well as agencies and organizations at the state, tribal, and federal level. These organizations included the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office, Medical Examiner's Office, and emergency medical services, as well as the Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe, Green Cross, the Red Cross, Washington State Public Health and Emergency Management, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and local hospitals in three different counties.

Q: Can you elaborate on how the MRC worked with these organizations to coordinate the response?

During the response, the MRC had about 200 volunteers. Of those volunteers, 70 to 80 members were active, while the rest were unable to participate because of work obligations or because they were out of town. Due to the

magnitude of this response, the MRC volunteers were asked to staff the emergency call center, as well as provide logistical support to the emergency operations center (EOC). Information gathered from people reporting family members as missing was given to the medical examiner's office where volunteers assisted in gathering more information from families. MRC mental health providers provided support to community members and responders who were located at the site of the mudslide. The Sauk-Suiattle tribal clinic requested medical staff, so the MRC sent volunteers who were doctors and physician assistants to help support the clinic. As the local MRC coordinator, I worked closely with the Washington Department of Health to communicate what resources were needed to help with the response.

[Read the rest of the interview](#)

Twitter Chat: Student Health Volunteers

Preparing for the next emergency starts long before a disaster strikes and student health volunteers can play an important role in helping communities prepare, respond, and recover. They can support public health in so many ways – from staffing vaccination clinics to helping with public education campaigns to serving as part of the disaster response.

Whether you are interested in trying to get students to volunteer in your community or you are a student who is considering volunteering, join the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR) and partners for the Student Health Volunteers twitter chat on April 21 from 1-2pm ET. Use #NHSS in all your tweets.

Chat topics will include the following:

- Why volunteering matters to students and how it helps you and your community
- When is the best time to make the choice to volunteer and how volunteering before a disaster strikes makes your community more healthy when disaster strikes
- What are some common barriers to volunteering and how to overcome them
- What is unique about student volunteers and what special skills they bring to preparedness, response and recovery programs
- Where young people can learn more about volunteering

[Visit the ASPR website to learn more](#)



The mission of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) is to be a leader, partner, catalyst, and voice with local health departments.

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