



MRC In Touch

Volunteers Building Strong, Healthy, and Prepared Communities

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Featured Article

University of New Mexico MRC Supports Tomé Pilgrimage

Every year on Good Friday, more than 20,000 people trek from the base of Tomé Hill in Valencia County, New Mexico to its peak, a 10-15 mile walk. Tomé Hill is located in a small community that does not have the capacity to serve all the participants making the pilgrimage alone. Many participants have done little training to prepare for this walk, and the climb to the peak can be treacherous, making it necessary to have an adequate first responder presence.

Three years ago, the Albuquerque-University of New Mexico MRC (A-UNM-MRC) unit leader Luke Esquibel approached the health department's emergency manager to offer the MRC's services. Today, the MRC is fully imbedded in the event. Volunteers are stationed with the EMTs throughout the trek, taking a lot of pressure off the fire department. The unit is also involved in planning meetings. This year, there were around 15 MRC volunteers. While most had medical backgrounds, the nonmedical volunteers played an integral part in triaging walkers before they sought help at medical tents.

The A-UNM-MRC also uses this event to practice and evaluate their emergency and disaster response plan. While it is hard for event coordinators to anticipate how many walkers will attempt to complete the pilgrimage, the MRC works with the fire department to plan for multiple injury scenarios. The MRC's involvement in the event has created a great partnership, strengthening the community beyond the pilgrimage.

MRC/NACCHO Connections

NACCHO and DCVMRC Adopt the Competencies for Disaster Medicine and Public Health for MRC Volunteers

NACCHO, in collaboration with the DCVMRC, is pleased to announce that the MRC has adopted the Competencies for Disaster Medicine and Public Health (DMPH Competencies) as the new competency set for the MRC Volunteers.

"The Competencies for Disaster Medicine and Public Health provide guidelines for a baseline set of skills for Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) volunteers. The guidelines will allow MRC unit leaders to develop training plans and cultivate response capabilities in their communities. They can also use the guidelines to improve coordination with response partners and more closely align with our national mission to improve the health, safety and resiliency of the nation," said CAPT Rob Tosatto, Director of the DCVMRC.

The National Center for Disaster Medicine and Public Health (NCDMPH) serves as an academic home for the development and dissemination of core skills, knowledge, abilities, and for research on education and training strategies in the field of disaster medicine and public health. The NCDMPH developed the DMPH Competencies in 2012 in collaboration with a multidisciplinary expert working group. The DMPH Competency set is designed specifically for disaster and public health preparedness, response, and management. They are widely understood to define the knowledge and skills needed for a healthcare professional and/or first responder to perform a task in a safe and consistent manner. "Constructing the training of MRC volunteers around these core competencies provides a skeleton upon which to care for our fellow citizens. The NCDMPH is thrilled with the MRC adoption of

the core competencies in DMPH and pledges to support the effort as much as possible," said Dr. Kenneth Schor, Acting Director of the NCDMPH.

NACCHO has [developed resources](#) that are designed to illustrate the connections between the DMPH Competencies and the mission and work of the MRC network. These resources can be downloaded from [NACCHO's Medical Reserve Corps Toolbox](#) and used to help supplement MRC Volunteer Orientations or to share with partners and key stakeholders. To access the materials, enter "Medical Reserve Corps" into the search bar. NACCHO is also working with MRC TRAIN to develop a nationally recommended training plan for the MRC using the DMPH Competencies as the foundation for MRC Volunteer training. The [NCDMPH](#) also provides a wealth of information about the competencies and general information in the field of disaster health.

Announcements

NACCHO Podcast Series Explores the National Health Security Strategy

Earlier this year, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR) released a revised version of the [National Health Security Strategy](#) (NHSS). The document provides strategic direction to ensure that efforts to improve health security nationwide over the next four years are guided by a common vision; based on sound evidence; and carried out in an efficient, collaborative manner. During the 2015 Preparedness Summit, CAPT Rob Tosatto, Director, Division of the Civilian Volunteer Medical Reserve Corps and Kara Marsh, Volunteer Coordinator of the Macomb County Health Department recorded an interview about the updated NHSS document and the role of the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) within the strategy for [NACCHO's Podcast Series](#).

NACCHO: CAPT Tosatto, can you tell us about the National Health Security Strategy and the role of MRC volunteers within that strategy?

CAPT Tosatto: The National Health Security Strategy is a large document that focuses on health security for the nation. It's not a federal document; it's for all of us. It's for the local, state, regional, and national on what they can do, on what everybody can do to improve health and safety in the nation. The Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) has a strong role to play in that. The MRC is a national network of local volunteers that are improving health in their communities. They're helping to reduce vulnerabilities and build resiliency, and then when they're needed, they respond and help the community to recover from disasters. Volunteers are a part of the national health security workforce and so we treat them as such. They are a strong component of it.

NACCHO: Kara, as a Volunteer Coordinator, can you provide some real world examples of the NHSS in action?

Kara: Absolutely. One of the things that it talks about is social networking for instance. Many volunteer organizations use Facebook, Twitter, and other social media to recruit volunteers, so that creates that social networking bond with the community. Other examples are networking with other community organizations. For example, we work with our library for the blind and physically handicapped talking to our low vision network and individuals who are blind and low vision and talking about their role as potential volunteers and their role in preparedness. As well as all of the community exercises that the Medical Reserve Corps volunteers are involved in all plays a part in the strategy.

[Read the rest of the interview here.](#)

New Guidance Available on Shelter Operations During Radiation Emergencies

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has released [A Guide to Operating Public Shelters in a Radiation Emergency](#). The guide, the result of a multiagency collaboration that included NACCHO, has been developed to assist with planning and response efforts related to shelter operations in a radiation emergency. The scope of the guide encompasses information and guidance about screening for radioactive contamination, decontamination, radiation monitoring, registration, health surveillance, and communications.

The guide grew out of a 2010 workshop in Atlanta that engaged mass care providers, radiation control officials, and public health personnel in a facilitated discussion to explore the unique challenges radiation emergencies pose for shelter operations. The workshop led to a narrowed workgroup which reviewed existing regulations and standards concerning radiation exposure and radioactive contamination to determine which ones were applicable to mass care operations.

The guide is designed for shelter operators, planners, and staff, emergency managers, public health professionals, volunteers, and radiation protection professionals. [Read more about the guide.](#)

MRC Participates in America's PrepareAthon

Launched in 2013, [America's PrepareAthon!](#) is a grassroots campaign focused on encouraging families, businesses, schools, volunteer groups, and houses of worship to prepare for emergencies through hazard-specific

group discussions, drills, and exercises. The National PrepareAthon! Days occur every April 30 and September 30.

This year, the MRC network participated in a nationwide drill in conjunction with America's PrepareAthon. MRC Regional Coordinators asked unit leaders whether they had checked the carbon monoxide and smoke detectors in their homes within the last 60 days. A total of 685 units responded and 75% of the respondents confirmed their detectors were in working order. Many unit leaders replicated this drill within their units. [Read more about America's PrepareAthon.](#)



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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