

# MA RESPONDS

Ready • Set • Respond



## QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

### HURRICANE IRENE – QUIET HEROES AT IT AGAIN

FALL 2011



Once again, shelters opened in communities in Western Massachusetts as residents and emergency response teams prepared for the onslaught of hurricane Irene. Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) volunteers were deployed to assist at shelters in Monson, Northampton and Springfield. Greeting displaced residents, assessing medical and special care needs as well as providing Psychological First Aid and basic comfort to people seeking shelter from the impacts of natural disasters were among the tasks that trained volunteers from the 17 MRC units in Western Massachusetts performed. Kathleen Conley Norbut, Coordinator, Western MA Medical Reserve Corps noted, "Our peers from across the state joined the local MRC volunteers to help people in our region; assisting diabetics with insulin injections, procuring special meals for those with dietary restrictions, assisting parents with children and elders with health concerns."

Thanks to the advance warning of hurricane Irene, MRC volunteers were able to check on their personal and family preparedness plans and supplies "We always remind our volunteers and ourselves, first things first," said Michael Nelson who coordinates five MRC units in Hampshire County. Each volunteer is asked to develop a personal preparedness plan and to participate in trainings to learn about Incident Command System (ICS) and the National Incident Management System (NIMS). Brief trainings are offered, at no-charge to MRC volunteers, on working with people dealing with psychological trauma and learning to care for their own emotional and behavioral health during a disaster. "That's the bedrock of the MRC core competencies," stated Nina Martin-Anzuoni, RN MRC and CERT Coordinator for Franklin County, "we truly believe that each volunteer needs to care for her/himself before preparing to care for others."

In addition to assisting people, the Berkshire County MRC unit has developed a Disaster Animal Response Team (DART). The Greenfield, Hilltown and the Greater Westfield MRC units all have volunteers specifically trained to use their DART trailers to assist with animal rescue and care when an emergency or disaster strikes the region. "We are so pleased with the interest and enthusiasm of MRC volunteers and residents when they learn that we can teach them to not only help themselves and their family, but to prepare their pets to be safer in an emergency or disaster," stated Corinne McKeown, coordinator of the Berkshire Medical Reserve Corps.

### MA RESPONDS NEWS

#### New Groups Join MA Responds

MA Responds continues to expand with the addition of four Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) units which will integrate into the system this month. The addition of Martha's Vineyard, Chicopee, Greater Taunton and Greater New Bedford brings the current total to 29 participating MRC units.

In addition, the state's Behavioral Health Disaster Responder network (BHDR) has joined MA Responds. BHDRs, or "crisis counselors," provide a short-term

intervention with individuals and/or groups experiencing psychological reactions to a major emergency and/or disaster and its aftermath.

If you are a unit interested in joining MA Responds, please visit the [MRC state website](#) to download a copy of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Once the MOU has been signed and returned to DPH, your unit can join a group of units integrating into the system. A copy of the MA Responds Policy and Procedures manual is also available on the [MRC state website](#). For more information about MA Responds, please contact [Lindsay Tallon](#).

#### **Follow Us on Twitter**

MA Responds is on Twitter. Please sign up with [Twitter](#) and become a follower of "MAResponds". Twitter will only be used in an emergency to provide volunteers with the most up-to-date information.

#### **MA RESPONDS ORIENTATION COURSE ONLINE**

The MA Responds online orientation course for volunteers is now available. The course provides an overview on how to prepare for and respond to a public health emergency or other event. It is intended to complement additional training volunteers will receive through face to face meetings with their local MRC unit or other volunteer group, other courses recommended by volunteer coordinators and "just-in-time" training provided on-site. Modules include: Public Health Preparedness, Incident Command System, Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication, Personal Preparedness, Activation, Safety and Security, Individuals Requiring Additional Assistance and Behavioral Health. The course can be accessed at [www.massmed.org/cme/maresponds](http://www.massmed.org/cme/maresponds) or by logging onto your MA Responds account. Click on administration/training and then scroll down to "MA Responds orientation course."

#### **VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: NEILDA HENKE**

Neilda Henke joined the Greater Westfield and Western Hampden County MRC to assist with H1N1 clinics in 2009. She could never have predicted that two years later, she would be a first responder to tornado victims just a short drive from her home. On Wednesday night, June 1, Ms. Henke received a request to deploy. She drove straight to Quarry Hill School, a make-shift Red Cross shelter in Monson, where she confronted a landscape of burgeoning devastation. Displaced residents trickled inside the shelter in search of refuge. Ms. Henke described the trauma as palpable.

In the disorder, Ms. Henke knew she had to develop a personal goal. It was upon meeting a family with their young daughter that Ms. Henke was able to actually articulate that goal. Shy but assertive, the daughter candidly approached Ms. Henke, "I don't like tomatoes," the child pronounced. Baffled but supportive, Ms. Henke pacified the child, "Well, we don't have any tomatoes here." The child's father decoded the strange declaration: "She means tornados, not tomatoes." Suddenly, Ms. Henke reported, her mission became tangible. "My role was clear; I had to immediately identify those in most critical need."

There were people arriving in wheelchairs and at least one using an oxygen tank. Transportation was limited if not nonexistent. Using her training as a nurse's assistant, Ms. Henke began triaging the wounded. She cleaned those who needed to be cleaned and called counselors for those who needed calming. With clarity and focus, Ms. Henke spent the first evening at the shelter assessing and aiding all of the incoming victims.

In the days that followed, Ms. Henke's tasks evolved. Hygiene became a big issue because there was no access to clean clothes. Residents went several days without being able to change. While cleanliness is always vital to health, it is even more imperative when working inside crowded quarters. Ms. Henke prevailed upon her husband in Southwick to coordinate clothing drop offs. Another critical issue that Ms. Henke resolved was the dearth of appropriately sized cots. Several shelter residents were obese; one spent the first night sleeping on a line of crates, another slept sitting up in a wheelchair. Ms. Henke negotiated with the appropriate agencies, and managed to acquire suitably-sized beds.

Ms. Henke credits much of her efficient preparedness to the MRC trainings, and most especially to her trust in Ed Mello, the Greater Westfield MRC unit leader. That bond of trust gave her the confidence she needed during deployment. "I'd follow you into the battlefield!" Ms. Henke reports telling Mr. Mello. Translating that conviction into action, Ms. Henke understood that productive communication with shelter residents could only be based on that same principle. Through relationship building, Ms. Henke effectively provided assistance to residents. The bonds formed enabled Ms. Henke not only to assist victims, but also to their track progress. She knows, for example, that the two wheelchair-bound victims she met within the first few hours at Quarry Hill are now situated in accessible homes in Springfield.

When Ms. Henke learned that tomatoes were really tornados, she bent down to the little girl and asked her, "Can I make you safe?" It is fair to say that she, along with many other MRC volunteers, dedicated themselves, their time, and their efforts, to achieving that very commitment.

#### **EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES & UPCOMING EVENTS**

##### **The 2011 Massachusetts Health Officers Association**

October 26 – 28, 2011

Springfield, MA

The annual Massachusetts Health Officers Association (MHOA) conference is an opportunity for members, public and environmental health professionals, and nurses to learn, network, and earn CEU's. For more information or to register, please go to <http://www.mhoa.com/index.aspx?NID=158>

##### **The 2012 Public Health Preparedness Summit**

February 21- 24, 2012

Anaheim, CA

The 2012 summit will focus on how to move forward in an environment of limited resources. Public health professionals and our partners from across the nation will present new research, new tools, and new practices to build and sustain a progressive public health preparedness infrastructure at the local, state, tribal, and territorial levels. For more information, or to register, please visit: [www.phprep.org](http://www.phprep.org).

##### **2012 Integrated Medical, Public Health Preparedness and Response Training Summit**

May 21-25, 2012

Nashville, TN

Abstract and poster submissions are currently being accepted for the 2012 summit. Topics of interest include Health Care Systems, Leadership, Public Health, Resource Management & Patient Movement and Response Integration/Operational Medicine. Session abstracts can be submitted until October 16, 2011, and poster abstracts can be submitted until March 16, 2012.

<http://teams.hhs.gov/conference/>

## PREPAREDNESS NEWS & RESOURCES

### **Vaccination Recommendations for 2011-2012 Influenza Season**

This year's recommendations contain relatively few changes from the 2010-2011 recommendations. Vaccination of everyone aged 6 months and older continues to be recommended. Children, pregnant women, adults 50 years of age and older, and adults 18 - 49 years of age with chronic medical conditions are at increased risk for complications from influenza, hospitalization, and death. For more information, visit: [www.cdc.gov/flu/](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/).

### **National Influenza Vaccination Week**

National Influenza Vaccination Week (NIVW) is a national observance that was established to highlight the importance of continuing influenza vaccination, as well as fostering greater use of flu vaccine after the holiday season into January and beyond. NIVW 2011-2012 is scheduled for December 4-10, 2011. For more information, visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/NIVW/>.

### **New Fact Sheets from the Get Ready Campaign**

New fact sheets include Child Preparedness, Parents and Preparedness, and Mental Health and Disasters. Also new is a vaccine series, with general information and tips for kids, teens and adults. Factsheets can be downloaded in PDF format or as customizable documents on which you can add your organization's logo. [http://www.getreadyforflu.org/new\\_pg\\_facts.htm](http://www.getreadyforflu.org/new_pg_facts.htm).

### **New Resource from the DPH Office of Health Equity: Flu Vaccine for Everyone! A Guide to Reaching and Engaging Diverse Communities**

Today, vaccination is recommended for almost everyone over the age of six months. One of the main challenges is immunizing groups that have traditionally been hard to reach. Racial, ethnic and linguistic (REL) populations are often isolated and have limited access to health information. Finding ways to work together to educate individuals and help reduce disparities in flu vaccination is a priority for DPH. The guide is currently available [online](#). Hard copies of this tool kit will be available soon through the DPH Office for Health Equity.

### **Social Media and Disasters: Current Uses, Future Options, and Policy Considerations**

This new report from the Congressional Research Service looks at the increasing role of social media in disasters and emergencies, summarizes ways these tools have been used by government officials and agencies, and examines the benefits and implications. <http://www.fas.org/sqp/crs/homesec/R41987.pdf>.

### **FEMA Releases the National Disaster Recovery Framework**

The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), along with many other federal partners, has officially released the [National Disaster Recovery Framework \(NDRF\)](#). The National Disaster Recovery Framework outlines how community recovery is supported and organized on a national level. It builds on scalable, flexible, and adaptable coordinating structures to align key roles and responsibilities, linking local, State, Tribal and Federal governments, the private sector, voluntary, faith-based and community organizations that all play vital roles in recovery.

## REGION or UNIT NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Section for optional additional news from units or from OCV MRC if appropriate

**Contact Us**

**MA RESPONDS**

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