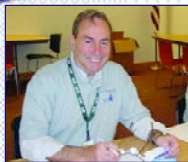


Massachusetts Medical Reserve Corps



Fall 2009

MRC Units Take an Active Role in Animal Disaster Preparedness

Over the past year, MRC unit leaders have been participating in meetings of the Animal Disaster Responder (ADR) Working Group. The group recognizes that animal response is an important component of any community's emergency preparedness. Emergency responders must be prepared to rescue and prepare shelters for pets and livestock. "In the past, we've seen disasters, such as hurricane Katrina, where people were unwilling to leave their homes without their pets," said Dawn Sibor, Brookline MRC coordinator and chair of the ADR Working Group. "We cannot effectively respond to disasters without planning for animals." The working group is engaging a wide range of agencies, including the State of Massachusetts Animal Response Team (SMART), the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA), Animal Control Officers Association of Massachusetts and the Massachusetts Veterinary Association. This group will establish best practices, share resources and open up new lines of communication. These strategies will better prepare local emergency response teams to ensure the safety and well-being of pets and livestock in an emergency.

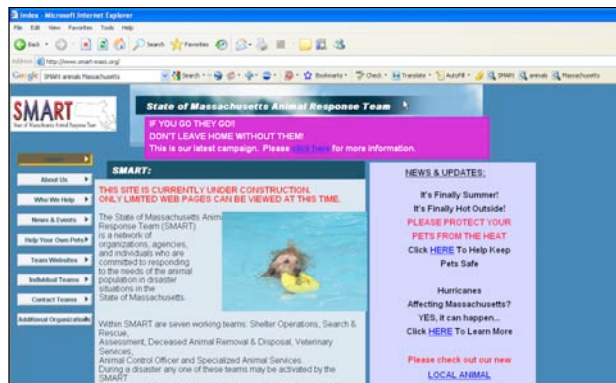
A lot of this work is already being done by other members of the ADR Working Group. SMART, for example, is a coordinated network of organizations, agencies and individuals committed to responding to the needs of the animal population in disaster situations. When a disaster spans across communities and drains local resources, MEMA can activate the SMART team from the state emergency operating center. This team can operate animal shelters, carry out search and rescue operations and provide veterinary services. In addition to SMART, many towns and cities have their own teams. "There are a lot of local animal response teams already out there," said Barbara

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What is MRC?

The Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) system was founded by the federal government shortly after 9/11. The national system brings together people who have health care skills with citizen volunteers. MRC units are trained and prepared to respond as a team to emergencies in their communities. The members may provide education, outreach and various health services throughout the year.



The home page for the State of Massachusetts Animal Response Team shares information about keeping your pet safe in a disaster as well as news about upcoming trainings and team meetings.



Many Hurricane Katrina refugees would not enter shelters without their pets.



H1N1 Update

MRC volunteers will play an important role in the local and state response to the H1N1 virus and flu season. In the coming months, the CDC will distribute mass quantities of H1N1 vaccine to each state. It will be up to the state and local public health to distribute and administer these vaccines. MRC volunteers may be called upon by local public health to support the setup and staffing of vaccination clinics. These clinics will help Massachusetts residents protect themselves and prevent the spread of the H1N1 virus. If you're interested in helping out in your community, contact your local MRC coordinator. You can find a list of Massachusetts MRC units on www.mamedicalreservecorps.org.

Coordinators for Bristol County MRC Collaborative Prepare Volunteer Management in July Tabletop Exercise

A strong pool of volunteers is critical for a well-prepared community. But simply having volunteers isn't enough. MRC unit leaders frequently work on developing more efficient protocols for training, credentialing and deploying volunteers. On July 22, Bristol County MRC Collaborative coordinators used their annual resource day to practice the logistics of preparing and deploying large numbers of volunteers.

The MRC units covering Bristol County's cities and towns, known as the Bristol County MRC Collaborative, hold an annual resource day for unit coordinators to gather and share their best practices. These events help local chapters better coordinate their planning with one another.

"Resource Day events promote communities working together as an MRC unit and units working together as a region," said Cheryl Bushnell, Bristol County MRC Collaborative coordinator. "Cooperation fosters better use of resources." This year, Ms. Bushnell planned an exercise that would test the Bristol County units' volunteer activation and deployment procedures on a regional level.

In the exercise, MRC unit leaders had to prepare a large number of volunteers for an H1N1 vaccination campaign. Participants had to work out the logistics of activating volunteers (including communication methods) preparing staging sites and processing and deploying volunteers. In the exercise's second phase, Worcester Regional MRC volunteers arrived in person at the event to be processed for deployment by the Bristol County coordinators, a surprise for participants.

The exercise highlighted some areas for improvement, such as managing volunteers with different credentials, identifying volunteer leaders and handling volunteers from other MRC units. One of the biggest challenges in

volunteer management is organizing groups of volunteers with varying levels of training. The exercise categorized volunteers into three groups: fully trained, partially trained and unaffiliated volunteers. To deploy volunteers with consistent credentials and training experience, MRC unit leaders use just-in-time trainings that prepare volunteers for basic deployment duties. Unit leaders determined that a large-scale deployment would require staging areas to run these trainings and issue identification badges.

To make matters more complicated, many MRC unit leaders double as local public health directors. Because these coordinators may become preoccupied with other responsibilities, Ms. Bushnell strongly recommends each unit identify dependable volunteer leaders who can help organize the deployment.

The afternoon session forced unit leaders to rethink how to manage volunteers from other communities. In the exercise, unit leaders discovered volunteers from other units might not have the same credentials or training experience. Bristol County MRC coordinators are participating in statewide discussions to understand the nuances of each unit's training protocols. In the future, MRC coordinators will be better prepared to receive and deploy another unit's volunteers.

Bristol County unit leaders are moving quickly to apply what they have learned. Units in the region have held follow-up meetings to improve their protocols. "The lessons learned were enough to motivate us for follow-up training and further preparations," said Alvin McMahon, the Greater Fall River MRC coordinator. MRC unit leaders and Ms. Bushnell are working on an after-action report that will be distributed to MRC units across the state.



Bristol County MRC Coordinators exhibit MRC promotional materials at their latest Resource Day.



Bristol County MRC Coordinators discuss how to best organize volunteers for disaster response.

Volunteer Spotlight: Rick and Kathy Savage



Kathy and Rick Savage exemplify the selfless work ethic and versatility that make MRC volunteers a vital part of their communities. Kathy, a nurse for the Elder Service Plan for the North Shore, and Rick, a staff member for the Social Security Administration, have lived in Revere for over 25 years. The Savages heard about the MRC

program from a mailing from their local public health office. Always looking for new ways to give back to the community, they joined the Region 4B MRC and have been active members for five years. “It’s definitely a worthwhile program,” said Rick Savage. “You get as much out of it as you put into it.” Kathy and Rick have put plenty into their MRC unit by attending multiple trainings, volunteering for deployments and recently taking a train-the-trainer course on Emergency Dispensing Sites protocols.

The Savages also bring critical skills for an emergency response as amateur (or ham) radio operators. In a disaster, MRC volunteers and emergency response officials use ham radios as an alternative way to communicate when phone lines are down. Kathy first noticed the utility of ham radios while volunteering for a multiple sclerosis charity bike event. “The radios were very helpful for road support volunteers to communicate,” said Kathy. “They reached places where phone reception was poor.” The Savages have since joined the North Shore radio association and own two portable ham radios and have one attached to their car. In the December 2009 ice storms, Rick and Kathy’s skills as ham radio



Rick and Kathy supporting their local MRC.

operators were a tremendous resource for emergency response officials. With the phone lines down near ice storm shelters in Gardner, Rick helped out at the Gardner police station operating the ham radio that was the only means of communication between the local shelters and hospital. Kathy also provided valuable care as a nurse at both of the shelters in Gardner.

Rick and Kathy Savage provide immeasurable help to their community and are a joy to work with. “They are always willing to help out in an emergency or training,” said Region 4B MRC coordinator Alison Burns. “They are a very valuable asset to our team and we definitely see them as group leaders and people we can turn to in an emergency.”

The Savages view the MRC program as one of many ways to stay active volunteering for their community. They also volunteer for the American Red Cross, the Special Olympics and various multiple sclerosis charity bike rides and walks. In their spare time, the Savages enjoy wood carving, photography and coin collecting.

Western MA MRC Units Incorporate New Strategic Plan

Running an MRC unit can be a challenging task for even the most experienced unit leaders. Even in a bleak economic environment with scarce funding, MRC units must prepare volunteers to help their community in a disaster. With limited financial resources, MRC unit leaders rely on disciplined planning and regional coordination to keep their units prepared.

In the interest of better coordination across communities, the 15 MRC unit leaders in western Massachusetts meet regularly to participate in the Western Massachusetts MRC Advisory Group (MAG). Unit leaders use these meetings to coordinate trainings, plan deployment procedures and share best practices. Over the past year this coordination has led to the development of a regional strategic plan that focuses MRC activities on the goal of efficiently maintaining a large group of volunteer emergency responders with uniform credentials and training.

The strategic plan document outlines a series of objectives. These include making the Western MA MRC units a “valued partner in any incident response, with credibility on public health issues” and providing responders who are “trained in advanced ICS (Incident Command System) and able to take on leadership roles.” To achieve these goals, unit leaders identified some intermediate objectives, ranging from the development of prepared volunteers to new sources of revenue. The strategic plan defines benchmarks and activities to achieve these objectives. This strategic process allows unit leaders to use their limited financial resources more efficiently. “This approach helps non-profit organizations, such as the MRC program, better use their resources and make sure that all of their activities are linked to a clearly defined goal,” said Thomas Williams, Regional Preparedness Program Manager for the Franklin Region Council of Governments.

Serving four counties, 15 MRC units and a diverse range of urban and rural communities in the region, the strategic plan must demonstrate some flexibility. MRC unit leaders

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DID YOU KNOW?

- On average, 60% of households have a pet (average is 1.5 pets per household).
- More than 67 percent of respondents in an ASPCA survey said they'd refuse to evacuate without their pets.
- The Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards (PETS) Act of 2006 supports the development of disaster plans that can accommodate people with pets and service animals.
- Most Red Cross shelters won't take pets, but will help people make arrangements with local animal shelters.

Legatowicz, the Animals in Disaster Coordinator and MEMA's liaison to SMART. "It's really a matter of networking and getting all of the disaster responders on the same page."

In Western Massachusetts, Barbara Wells, a Berkshire MRC volunteer, is working with MEMA and her local MRC unit to establish a local Disaster Animal Response Team (DART). Ms. Wells has extensive experience with SMART and the Central Mass Disaster Animal Response Team (CMDART). She is working closely with Berkshire MRC coordinator Corinne McKeown to recruit volunteers for the DART, distribute preparedness information and collect supplies for emergency animal shelters. The Berkshire MRC and Ms. Wells are also combining resources for public outreach. In September, the Berkshire MRC and Ms. Wells' DART shared a tent at the Berkshire South Emergency Preparedness and Family Safety Day in Great Barrington. Ms. Wells stays connected with statewide work as an active member of the ADR Working Group. "All of these little pieces across the state in animal preparedness are just now coming together," said Ms. Wells.

The Newton and Brookline MRC units are also preparing animal disaster preparedness with their local partners. The City of Newton Emergency Operations Plan provides strategies and procedures for rescue and capture, evacuation, and shelter operations. Brookline is currently developing a similar plan. The Brookline Health Department/MRC unit, and the Brookline Police Department/Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) and the Town of Brookline Animal Control Officer are developing a town-wide plan based on templates provided by MEMA, Watertown and Newton.

"We are developing formalized plans together so that we are all aware of each partner's role," said Ms. Sibor. City and town officials are already identifying hotels that would take in animals and plan to ask residents to donate old cages and leashes. These are just a small sample of the efforts being done around the state. With MRC units and other local and state agencies working together, animal disaster preparedness in Massachusetts will continue to improve.

Western MRC, continued from page 3

have been careful to strike a balance between developing a plan that adequately addresses the differences between communities and maintaining some level of consistency on a regional level. In the interest of local autonomy, the strategic plan is seen as guidance tool rather than a set of strict requirements. At the same time, the process for developing a strategic plan has improved regional coordination and will ensure that western Massachusetts units continue to work towards common goals. "We have been able to come together as a coalition, in a sense, to be on the same page about what we want to have happen in our communities," said Berkshire MRC unit leader, Corinne McKeown.

As priorities and objectives change, so too does the strategic plan document. There is no final version of the document and the MAG council continues to meet and review the plan. "This continuous planning and preparation will yield a better emergency response and recovery," said Western MA MRC coordinator Kathleen Conley Norbut.

www.mamedicalreservecorps.org



For More Information

or to view a video about Massachusetts MRC units, please visit the website at:
www.mamedicalreservecorps.org

For more details, please contact:
Regan Checchio
Regina Villa Associates
51 Franklin Street, Suite 400
Boston, MA 02110-1310
Telephone: 617-357-5772
rchecchio@mamedicalreservecorps.org

For more information about starting a MRC unit in your community, please contact the Region I (New England) USDHHS MRC Coordinator:
Jennifer Frenette,
BS NREMT-I, I/C
Regional Office:
JFK Federal Building, Room 2100
Boston, MA 02203
Telephone: 617-565-1492
jennifer.frenette@hhs.gov