

Special Edition

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### Disaster Follows Drill - Preparation Pays Off

When public health emergencies strike, the DHSS *Show-Me Response* team reports to the Volunteer Management Station in the Department of Health and Senior Services Department Situation Room (DSR). From there, the team can stay apprised of the situation and more accurately and quickly gauge the need for emergency health care and public health volunteers. When volunteers are needed, Volunteer Management staff can activate the *Show-Me Response* system and begin sending out messages to request the type and number of volunteers needed for the emergency.

The *Show-Me Response* team was tested like never before this spring, first while taking part in a multi-state and multi-agency emergency response exercise, then the very next week when real disaster struck.

Starting May 16 and for most of that week, Missouri participated in the National Level Exercise or NLE; a major emergency response drill involving local, state and federal emergency response agencies and entities (including the White House) in more than a half-dozen states. This exercise was based on a major earthquake in the New Madrid Seismic Zone. Many months were spent preparing for the exercise that was designed to push emergency response plans and preparations beyond the breaking point in a concentrated effort to find weaknesses that, if left unaddressed, could lead to more deaths and greater destruction that could have been prevented.



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During the exercise, the DSR was activated and running in high gear, with DHSS emergency response staff directed to concentrate on hospitals, public health, long-term care epidemiology, volunteer management and more.

The Volunteer Management Station responded to mock scenarios in which health professionals were requested to assist in the recovery from an earthquake. Many of our volunteers received “drill” calls asking them to log their availability to respond.

Shortly after the tornado hit Joplin, the Department’s DSR was reactivated, including the Volunteer Management Station. At 6:38 pm, the first of thousands of volunteers registered in *Show-Me Response*. One month after the tornado, more than 6,000 new volunteers had registered.

Stories and photos from the aftermath of one of the single worst tornados in history tried to tell the story. Those on the ground in Joplin told us there are no words or pictures to describe what really happened there. Within minutes after the storm passed, Joplin and the surrounding area went into emergency response mode. Volunteers of every kind descended on the area. Those with the energy and skills to help responded to the needs of their fellow citizens. Amazing stories of survival and heroism began to echo over the airways and across the Internet.

The response from health professionals was tremendous. Prior to the tornado there were just over 800 nurses registered in *Show-Me Response*. Today, that number tops 2,800! Nurses from every walk of life and every area of practice are included. Joplin-area hospitals met the need for nurses by employing their emergency plans and mutual aid agreements. These plans, developed and put in place prior to the tornado, proved to be a crucial asset in the response. We are proud and thankful to say that the system worked just as it was designed.

*Show-Me Response* is only authorized to activate and deploy volunteers when an approved request is received through the Missouri State Emergency Operations Center. Such a request was received just before 7 pm on May 31. A call was made to all 59 fully credentialed registered nurses (RNs) with Emergency Credential Level or ECL- 2 (at this writing there are 105 ECL 2 RNs in *Show-Me Response*). ECL 2 indicates volunteers providing patient care in the outpatient or community setting. By 9 pm, more than two dozen RNs had logged a response of: *Available* - 6, *Unsure* - 10 or *Not Available* - 12. By 9:30 pm, three nurses were on the mission roster, one of whom would arrive onsite by noon the next day. The June 1 -9, 2011, mission eventually included a roster of eight RNs. One of those nurses was a newly registered volunteer whose credentialing process had just been completed.

Thanks to all *Show-Me Response* volunteers who answered the call for help after the Joplin tornado, and to all registered volunteers who stand ready to answer future calls when disaster is sure to strike somewhere, sometime.

### **Volunteer Builds a Bridge between AmeriCorps and Show-Me Response**

The May 31, 2011 *Show-Me Response* request for volunteers originated from AmeriCorps. They needed registered nurses to provide basic first aid and triage to victims and volunteers. But how did AmeriCorps connect with *Show-Me Response*? Dale Green, RN (a *Show-Me Response* volunteer since October 2010) was in Joplin working with AmeriCorps. On May 31,

Dale and AmeriCorps personnel anticipated the need for first aid stations to serve both the AmeriCorps volunteers and tornado victims who would be coming to a food stamp distribution site. The campus of Missouri Southern State University (MSSU) was home to both of these functions. Dale called the Department of Health and Senior Services and was put in touch with the *Show-Me Response* team. Soon the wheels were in motion to craft a request for volunteers and start the request on the journey through the local emergency operations center (LEOC) to the state EOC (SEOC) and finally to the volunteer management station in the Department Situation Room (DSR). Just 24 hours passed from the time of this initial inquiry to the arrival in Joplin of the first nurse deployed for this mission. Our thanks to *Show-Me Response* volunteer, Dale Green, for his help in connecting AmeriCorps to *Show-Me Response*.

## **Criteria for Deployment**

For a volunteer to be called for potential activation, the *Show-Me Response* database must contain current, accurate contact information for every registered volunteer, but that's not all. Information regarding identity, licensure (if applicable), activation preferences, and special skills or certifications is also needed. This allows the *Show-Me Response* team to sort volunteers by a number of variables. For example, if *Show-Me Response* receives a request for hospital-ready (ECL 1) nurses, with ICU experience, willing to deploy in-state for a period of three to seven days, a database search for volunteers meeting those criteria will be made. Individuals who work in the hospital setting should have an Emergency Credential Level of ECL 1. To qualify for this ECL designation, a volunteer must have supplied their Place of Practice in the Occupations tab, under their profession. Clinical practice information is verified initially and every six months thereafter. When a volunteer changes employment, it is necessary to update the record. Without current employment information, licensed health professionals are assigned an ECL 3. These volunteers may be assigned to do general health-related tasks if deployed. In addition, according to federal guidelines, physicians must enter a valid DEA number and expiration date if they are to be appropriately assigned an ECL 1.

The *Show-Me Response* program recommends that volunteers communicate with their employer in advance of an emergency, regarding the *Show-Me Response* process. When a request to be excused from work due to a possible deployment is made, it will not come as a surprise. To help with this, useful documents are available on the *Show-Me Response* homepage, under "FORMS." The form for volunteer deployment is provided for the volunteer's convenience and is not required by *Show-Me Response*. Check with your employer to learn more about the policies regarding volunteer deployment. When *Show-Me Response* makes a request, volunteers should contact their supervisor in order to determine if it is feasible to accept an assignment.

## **The Importance of Unit Affiliation (especially for non-medical and non-licensed volunteers)**

Missouri's *Show-Me Response* volunteer program accepts registrants from the medical and health professions well as individuals with a wide variety of skills from fields outside of medicine and health. Missouri has worked to develop Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) units at

the local and regional levels. These units are associated with a local public health agency or other local health care entity and are available to provide critical assistance with local emergency response activities. MRCs need volunteers with a variety of skills to assist the unit with logistical support functions. In a disaster it takes all types of skills to address the many issues that arise. Medical Reserve Corps units participate in *Show-Me Response* to take full advantage of the database's unique capabilities to track, contact and assign volunteers. Federal requirements for our system include recruiting and credentialing 20 specific health professions. *Show-Me Response* has more than 160 different professions as part of the database. It is very important for registrants who are not licensed in a health-related field to affiliate with a local volunteer unit or MRC. **In a disaster, the *Show-Me Response* team will only be able to activate licensed/certified health professionals.** Those volunteers who are not health professionals will only be called to deploy if they are affiliated with a medical reserve corps or other unit. These units present opportunities for service and training and are formed based on more specific missions and goals. There are over 30 MRCs and other units within *Show-Me Response*. If you need information on how to access a local unit, please give us a call (573-751-6110) or send us an e-mail to [showmeresponse@health.mo.gov](mailto:showmeresponse@health.mo.gov).

### **Editing Profiles (or How to Get the Red Out)**

Volunteers can access their record to add information or make changes at any time. Items that are deficient appear in **red**, meaning that critical information is missing. The *Affiliation* tab is the most disconcerting to volunteers since they may not know where to "affiliate." When registering, this section provides information about each type of affiliated unit. Many volunteers select *no affiliation*, and the *Show-Me Response* team accepts those volunteers into the State Coordinator's Unit until the volunteer chooses to affiliate with an MRC or other unit. When a call for volunteers comes to *Show-Me Response*, this group is queried for volunteers that meet the criteria in the request.

Another area often in red is under the *Occupations* tab for professionals. If the volunteer does not enter any information (page not visited, or credential information incomplete), the *Show-Me Response* team confirms licensure, if applicable. The rest of the information regarding certifications, specialties, and place of practice must be supplied by the volunteer. The other areas appearing in **red**, e.g., *Activation Preferences*, or *Contact Information*, must also be supplied by the volunteer entering their profile and completing the various sections.

Most edits do require the volunteer to scroll to the bottom of the page and select *Save the Changes*. Others have a *Change* button right in the sector being edited. All changes will be acknowledged by **green lettering** or a **banner** across the top of the screen that indicates the change was successfully made. A recent change to the database **requires** the volunteer to enter their *place of practice* on the *Occupations* screen. This information is required to assign the correct emergency credential level (ECL). Those volunteers providing patient care in a hospital setting are assigned ECL 1. Patient care in the community setting is indicated by ECL 2. An ECL 3 indicates the health professional does not provide direct patient care but holds a current license to practice. This also applies to those professions identified by specialty certification if Missouri does not license that profession. **A licensed volunteer cannot be**

**activated without an ECL.** With complete information, an ECL 3 will be assigned upon registration in *Show-Me Response*. The ECL will be changed to a 1 or 2, if appropriate, as soon as a volunteer's place of practice is verified. In the case of **Incomplete Practice Information**, the *Show-Me Response* team must enter a placeholder, such as *Unknown*, in the required fields. We use a 0 for the unknown street address, etc. Without using placeholders, we are unable to enter licensure information that would credential a volunteer as ECL 3. Ideally, a volunteer provides complete *Place of Practice* information and this additional step may be avoided.

We encourage all volunteers to check their profile regularly for current information. There will be an *Edit* button at the top left of each screen, and a *Save the Changes* button on the lower right. We have recently expanded the list of hospitals on our drop-down menu. Again, it is important to save any changes made.

## Affiliations

Those licensed health professionals who do not select an affiliation when registering with *Show-Me Response* will be affiliated with the State Coordinator's Unit. This grouping is an administrative function, so that volunteers may be contacted more easily during exercises or activation. A volunteer may change this affiliation any time they identify a unit that better meets their needs. *Show-Me Response* always encourages local affiliations for easier networking, local volunteer opportunities and training. For instance, the South-Central MRC unit was able to send trained volunteers as a team with the Phelps County Health Department to Joplin to assist in city-wide tetanus vaccinations. The Missouri Volunteer Veterinary Corps used *Show-Me Response* to query their trained volunteers for availability and assignment into deployment teams to assist the Missouri Humane Society with the pet sheltering in Joplin.

Once an affiliation is selected, the volunteer should be contacted by the unit administrator to let them know about any particular requirements for acceptance. The volunteer receives a message when they have been accepted into the unit. Local units benefit from having all their volunteers registered in *Show-Me Response*, as this allows the unit administrator to manage the volunteers electronically, to send messages, activate the unit, track training courses, etc. Volunteers also receive a message if they are declined (rejected) by a unit - this is usually due to geographic location. If that volunteer is eligible for *Show-Me Response*, they will then become a part of the State Coordinator's Unit.

**The Call** is produced by the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services' Center for Emergency Response and Terrorism.

If you have information you'd like to share with the readership, contact Anne Kyle at [Anne.Kyle@health.mo.gov](mailto:Anne.Kyle@health.mo.gov).

The Center for Emergency Response and Terrorism provides leadership and coordination of efforts to prepare and respond to public health threats in partnership with other federal, state and local agencies.

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