



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Medical Reserve Corps Volunteers Step-Up

(Western Massachusetts) Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) volunteers have been deployed to assist at shelters in Greenfield, Turners Falls, Colrain, Holyoke, Monson, Northampton, Pittsfield, 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 are among the tasks that trained volunteers in the 17 MRC units in Western Massachusetts perform. Deployments of MRC volunteers to assist local public health and emergency management has become a more frequent occurrence since the ice storms in December 2009. Across the state MRC volunteers responded to the devastating tornadoes in Western Massachusetts on June 1<sup>st</sup>. MRC volunteers staffed the two urban shelters in Springfield and West Springfield, 24-7 for the 30 day duration of the shelter operations.

“MRC volunteers are both medical and non-medical community members who give of their time and talent to assist others with emergency or disaster situations like the impacts of the current flooding and evacuations due to hurricane Irene.” stated Kathleen Conley Norbut, Coordinator, Western MA Medical Reserve Corps. While some will go back to their regular schedules on Monday, Conley-Norbut cautioned that there are still hundreds of people impacted in the region, especially in Franklin County. “MRC volunteers have continued to assist with the sheltering of people evacuated due to the threats and realities of flooding from hurricane Irene throughout Western Massachusetts.” She said.

With advance warning heralding the arrival of hurricane Irene, MRC volunteers have been able to check on their personal and family preparedness plans and supplies, and have once again, quietly stepped up in the dark of night despite wind and rain to assist the emergency response in the region. “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 and we are fortunate to have both Medical Reserve Corps volunteers as well as Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) active in Franklin County.”

In the more rural regions of Western Massachusetts, the Berkshire County MRC unit has developed a Disaster Animal Response Team (DART). Along with Berkshire County MRC, Greenfield, Hilltown and the Greater Westfield MRC units have trained volunteers specifically 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. “our MRC volunteers and our DART specialists are ready to meet hurricane Irene.” She said.

Quiet heroes from the Medical Reserve Corps are on part of the many levels of volunteers and professionals needed in an emergency. To learn more about the Medical Reserve Corps or what you can do to prepare go to: [www.wmmrc.org](http://www.wmmrc.org).