

# STRATFORD-TRUMBULL-MONROE MRC BULLETIN



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## Tropical Storm Irene in Review

Tropical Storm Irene hit the region on August 27<sup>th</sup>, inflicting not only structural damage but also an extended power outage that challenged the public health of our community. The storm led to the activation of the Stratford-Trumbull-Monroe MRC unit, providing members with an opportunity to test both their personal emergency skills as well as their knowledge of how to assist in the municipal shelter. Several MRC volunteers worked alongside the Stratford Health Department staff to operate the shelter for over 40 hours. The majority of the shelter's 67 residents was there to seek refuge from the immediate effects of the storm and returned to their homes after the storm had passed. However, a few residents whose homes had no electricity or whose relatives had left them with no transportation, remained until the shelter was closed. MRC volunteers used their psychological first aid skills to transition these residents back into their homes or another shelter. Volunteers also phoned Stratford's special needs residents for well checks.

The power outages in Connecticut varied widely by municipality. In Stratford, parts of town lost power for up to a week. Since this occurred in an area of homes with well water, MRC volunteers distributed water and ice at the Oronoque firehouse.

Tropical Storm Irene provided emergency planners with many lessons to incorporate into future planning. One of the most significant points is that communities need to prepare for long-term power

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outages. People who depend on electricity for medical needs must develop power contingency plans and acquire battery or generator back-up for their devices. People who depend on supplemental oxygen must contact their oxygen provider prior to the disaster and discuss plans in case of an outage.

Emergency planners view every disaster as a learning experience. Disaster responses are reviewed in detail by the emergency preparedness staff and After Action Reports analyzing the event are submitted to the State. The Health Department met with several Irene volunteers to gain valuable feedback on how to better prepare for the next disaster. The discussion revealed that volunteers need more shelter training with clear and concise job descriptions, staff should be located at a site away from the registration tables, the shelter must have a private area so that people can talk confidentially, and that the American Red Cross can be stretched too thin in a wide-spread disaster, limiting its effectiveness and ability to support a municipality.

The Stratford Health Department is very grateful for the assistance of the MRC members during the storm and ensuing power outage. The MRC again demonstrated that it is an important town asset that plays a crucial role in operating both the medical and logistical aspects of

shelters, as well as in building community resiliency through activities that focus on health promotion and emergency preparedness.

### Emergency Preparedness Workshops Are Underway

Tropical Storm Irene and October's Winter Storm Alfred have proven to the community the importance of personal preparedness. While people seem to know they need to do something, for many residents preparing for unexpected disasters is a daunting task that can be easily put off. The Stratford Health Department has created an emergency preparedness workshop and Power Point presentation to provide people with the information they need to develop their personal plans, assemble their kits and improve their emergency communication. In October approximately 60 Oronoque Village residents attended the presentation that was hosted by the Oronoque Men's Club. In early November, 40 secretaries participated in the workshop as part of the Stratford Board of Education's continuing education program. Upcoming events include a presentation to students and families at Wooster Middle School.

The length of the presentation varies between 60 to 90 minutes depending on the amount of questions and group discussion. In order to encourage people to attend, the Stratford Health Department is donating two-person emergency backpacks filled with supplies to be raffled off at each event. Participants also receive FEMA pamphlets, brochures and activity books for children.

As part of this outreach effort, MRC members are strongly encouraged to help spread the word on the

*He is most free from danger,  
who, even when safe, is on his  
guard. - Publilius Syrus  
Latin writer - First Century BC*

importance of preparedness. Surveys have shown that while most people believe that they could be affected by a major disaster in the next five years, less than ten percent of the population is actually prepared. The MRC can play an important role in educating the public on how to become prepared for all types of emergencies. The following are some ways that volunteers can help to educate the community on how to prepare for unexpected disasters:

- Ask faith-based and civic organizations, PTAs, clubs, condominium associations, etc. if they would be interested in hosting an event for their members. MRC volunteers can then work with Sandi Sharp to schedule and present the workshop.
- Discuss emergency preparedness topics with neighbors and friends and direct people to visit [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov).
- Distribute FEMA brochures to family, friends and acquaintances either on your own or through the MRC at a community event.
- Make individual preparedness a New Year's resolution!

To receive supplies of FEMA materials for distribution or for assistance in scheduling a community event please contact Sandi Sharp at 203-385-4090 or [mrc@townofstratford.com](mailto:mrc@townofstratford.com).

### Winter Storm Alfred update

Winter Storm Alfred left little damage in Stratford, but caused extended power outages in Trumbull and Monroe as well as the majority of communities in Connecticut. Stratford-Trumbull-Monroe MRC volunteers were called upon to assist during the night and evening shifts in shelters in Monroe, Danbury and Wallingford. Three MRC members were able to assist at these shelters. Special thanks go out to Mary Ellen Kachuba who worked at the Special Needs shelter in Danbury and Beth Carbone and Michelle Wheeler who served in Monroe.

### CT Volunteers Honored at MRC Appreciation Luncheon

All volunteers were invited to attend the State MRC appreciation luncheon on September 23, 2011 at the Water's Edge Resort in Westbrook. A dozen volunteers from the Stratford-Trumbull-Monroe MRC attended the event that included presentations from Jonathan Best, Mary Duley, State of CT MRC Coordinator, and Rear Admiral Michael Milner, the Regional Health Administrator for Region 1. The keynote speaker was Jeanne-Aimee DeMarrais, Director, Domestic Emergencies Unit from Save the Children. She discussed the special needs of children in shelters and the role MRC volunteers could serve in helping to ensure the health and safety of children following a disaster. Volunteers who attended received a glass plaque in appreciation for their service and dedication to the health of their communities.



### Nearing the Flu Clinic Finish Line in Stratford

The 2011 flu clinics began on October 1<sup>st</sup> with a combined clinic and health fair and an inventory of roughly 800 vaccine doses. MRC volunteers participated in several subsequent clinics including two at the Baldwin Center, a very successful clinic at Oronoque Village, a clinic for children and families at Sterling House and several at the Health Department. Despite stiff competition from pharmacies and large retailers, as of December 1<sup>st</sup>, inventory is now less than 90 vaccines! Many thanks to all of the clinic volunteers who helped to make this season a success.

### MRC Honors Outstanding Volunteers

While all active volunteers play a vital role in supporting the community's health, the National MRC program wanted each unit to nominate its most outstanding volunteers for 2011. This year's award goes to Annie Christy, Wayne Theriault and Dr. Linda Strong. Annie's consistent dedication is evident by her participation at nearly every flu clinic, community event, meeting and training program. Wayne, also an active participant, has accepted a position on the Board of the Regional Training Institute. Linda has devoted her career to public health nursing and has supported the Stratford Health Department and the community not only through her personal efforts, but also through the partnership with Sacred Heart University and its nursing students. The Stratford Health Department and Stratford-Trumbull-Monroe MRC are extremely grateful for everyone's service, and especially for the service of these outstanding volunteers. Annie, Linda, and Wayne each received a certificate signed by Rear Admiral Michael Milner and Jennifer Frenette, our Regional Coordinator. Congratulations to Annie, Linda and Wayne!

### Like Us on FaceBook!

The Stratford-Trumbull-Monroe MRC now has a FaceBook page. To access this page from your FaceBook account, search on Stratford-Trumbull-Monroe Medical Reserve Corps. This page will contain news, announcements, links and articles on important public health and emergency preparedness issues. Every volunteer who "likes" the page promotes the MRC and its mission, assists in recruitment efforts and spreads the word on the importance of preparedness. Check out this site today!

### Staff and Volunteers Train on Tent Assembly

Region 1 now has three large tents that are suitable for clinics or triage. One of these tents will be stored in Stratford. In late September, Health Department staff and MRC volunteers attended a tent demonstration in Fairfield, where staff was setting up for an actual flu clinic. Stratford will receive a similar tent that does not require continual airflow for support along with a generator to power the initial set-up. As a result of this exercise, an instruction card was created incorporating lessons learned to facilitate assembly.



### News from the Regional Training Summit

Sandi Sharp, MRC Coordinator, attended the Regional Training Summit that took place from November 16<sup>th</sup> through 18<sup>th</sup> at the Avon Old Farms Hotel in Avon, CT. This annual training included unit leaders from MRC units located in FEMA Regions I and II, which cover all New England states as well as New York and New Jersey. The conference began with an update on MRC activities in both regions that conveyed that in 2011 nearly every unit responded to a weather related emergency. MRC units in northern New York and New England dealt with unprecedented flooding due to melting snow and heavy spring rains. While New England was dealing with the wind damage and resulting extended power outage from Tropical Storm Irene, western New York and the Binghamton area experienced such severe flooding from Tropical Storm Lee that shelters remain open more than

three months after the storm. In New England and eastern New York, the damage from winter storm Alfred in late October made it very clear that emergency planners need to focus on preparing for long-term power outages in their communities. The summit included a presentation from the American Red Cross (ARC) that clarified ARC's capabilities during wide-spread disasters. In the open forum discussion that followed their presentation, it was clear that emergency planners must partner more with ARC and include them in the planning process.

Captain Rob Tosatto, Director of the Office of the Civilian Volunteer Medical Reserve Corps, spoke about the direction the national MRC is headed. He revealed that taping will begin in December for a commercial to recruit volunteers that will air on public television. He also emphasized the value of partnering with the community and engaging youth in volunteer service activities.

In addition, the conference featured several training courses including an introduction to using social media, partnering with faith-based organizations and the Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA), planning for a radiological response, crisis communication and fire-fighter rehab. The Power Point slides and recorded sessions will be posted on the MRC website at [www.townofstratford.com/health](http://www.townofstratford.com/health) as soon as they are available.

The staff of the Stratford Health Department and Trumbull-Monroe Health District wish all volunteers a happy, safe and healthy holiday season.