



Getting Prepared to be a Volunteer at a Disaster

Facilitator Guide

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Midwest Consortium for Hazardous Waste Worker Training

Acknowledgments

The Midwest Consortium (MWC) developed this introduction to health and safety considerations for volunteers who will be traveling to a disaster to assist the local community in clean-up under cooperative agreement number U45 ES 06184 from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. We gratefully acknowledge the input to content from the New England Consortium (TNEC) Hazardous Materials & Emergency Response Training Program, particularly David J. Coffey, Robert Zalewski and Craig Slatin; use of TNEC photos of 24-hour and 72-hour packs is gratefully acknowledged. Input to materials from Mary Williams at the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice strengthened the program.

We encourage you to comment on these materials. Please give any suggestions to your Program Director.

Warning

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The material was prepared for use by experienced instructors who are providing an introduction to health and safety considerations to persons who are or who anticipate volunteering for clean-up operations. Users are cautioned that the subject is constantly evolving. Therefore, the material may require additions, deletions, or modifications to incorporate the effects of that evolution occurring after the date of this material preparation.

This training does not substitute for on-site training and regular updates. Additional, task-specific training may be required on-site.

Content was updated May 22, 2024 and all web links are active as of that date. If you find an error, please inform the facilitator so that it can be updated.

Getting Prepared for Volunteer Activities

Time Requirement: 1 hour total

Number of Instructors: 1 or more, consistent with ratio shown in Minimum Criteria

Materials

- Participant Guide
- Whiteboard or equivalent; markers
- Internet access

Objectives

When completed, participants will be better able to:

- Identify what you need to know before you depart
- Recognize factors to consider in packing
- Recognize possible hazards
- Identify resources to minimize exposure to hazards

Teaching Methods

- Presentation/discussion
- Small-group activity

Suggested Instructor Preparation

- Review Participant Guide, exercises and listed on-line resources
- Test web links prior to the session and If any are inoperative please notify your Program Director
- Identify details of the disaster where these participants will be volunteers. Is it a totally volunteer effort, or are these volunteers part of an organized response with ICS?
- Prepare an outline for notes to be included in the program file
- Ensure that you have access to the resources

Minimum Content Requirements

- Facilitate a discussion of what to ask before going to the disaster site
- Facilitate a discussion on packing, and repacking for the short term
- Working in small groups, have participants review relevant resources and complete the worksheet. Facilitate report back.

Questions You May Be Asked

1. Participants might remark, "Are you sure this will be safe?" Facilitate a discussion about PPE and other approaches to minimizing exposure. Suggest that everyone keep a log of activities so they will have a record of possible exposures. Use this as a reason to know who to contact should anything unexpected occur during the work.

2. Also, participants may ask, "Am I dragging contaminants back to my housing?" The answer could be yes. Facilitate a discussion of approaches to minimize 'carry home' such as bag shoes and wear flip-flops at the housing, cover hair during work, wash hand/face before eating, wash hands before touching water bottles and other supplies that will be taken to the housing.

3. Why does the 24-hour pack not include PPE? Depending on distance and task, these would likely be transported for the group.

Presentation of the Session

This session can be presented as follows:

Review the objectives.

What do I need to know before I leave?

Determine if the participants are leaving soon for a known location or are preparing in advance for a later yet-to-occur event. This will help frame the discussion.

Ask: what do you need to know to get ready? Add to the list in the Participant Guide, as participants suggest additional questions.

Facilitate a discussion about why each question is important.

Ask: on your last vacation, did you take any clothes that you did not wear?

Ask: Did your suitcase get heavier as the vacation progressed?

Review the three rules of packing

Then ask: What should you not take?

Make a list on the white board. This might include bulky clothing (unless severe cold is anticipated), large electronics, a stack of DVDs.

Turn to the Participant Guide, and review what to pack.

If participants will only be in one place, go over the 'day pack'; if multiple locations, discuss matching duration away with supplies that will be needed. See the two figures, 24-hour and 72-hour packs. Link this back to reasons to know where assigned and for how long.

Another resource to mention for personal packing is <https://www.ready.gov/kit>.

What else prepares me to work safely?

Turn to the resource listing in the Participant Guide.

Facilitate a discussion of differences between disasters:

High wind - no rain just wind

Earthquake - underground and surface damage

Hurricane - rain and wind

Floods - water, snakes, mold

Fire - smoke, heat

Oil spill - land and water contamination; possible fire

Turn to the Participant Guide and ask: What are sources of information about possible hazards? Review the list of sources by asking leading questions.

Review the list of actions to take if injured or feeling ill.

Exercise – Possible Hazards and Controls

During this exercise participants will work in small groups to use one of the resources to complete the short work sheet. If the group has not been notified of where they are going, make assignments so that groups use different resources; if they do know the event, make assignments to work on different hazards (physical injury, lung, skin, stress) for the same type of disaster. (Using the NIEHS Earthquake booklet, this can be done by specifying page number such as 38-48, 54-63, 72-85; selection depending on what participants will be doing.)

- Participants should identify the hazard, effect and how to avoid/minimize
- Facilitate a report-back

There are national guidelines on work at disasters. Introduce the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the Incident Command System (ICS). Refer to the figure in the Participant Guide and point out

- Incident Commander
- Structure

Work to assist the community is done according to an Emergency Response Plan (ERP) that includes descriptions of how to do tasks and minimize exposure. These approaches will be described during on-site training/briefing. These systems are described in the NIEHS booklets.

Review the activities that are done within the ICS.

Another source of information is the Incident Status Summary (ICS 209) maintained by the Incident Commander and posted at the briefing center:

[https://training.fema.gov/emiweb/is/icsresource/assets/ics%20forms/ics%20form%20209,%20incident%20status%20summary%20\(v3\).pdf](https://training.fema.gov/emiweb/is/icsresource/assets/ics%20forms/ics%20form%20209,%20incident%20status%20summary%20(v3).pdf)

Introduce OSHA and contrast volunteer and paid workers. HOWEVER, underscore that the requirements of OSHA will help protect the volunteers. Hazards do not discriminate based on employment status.

Point out that each state has additional resources and listings of organizations that coordinate volunteer activities and/or maintain lists of those willing to serve as volunteers.

Forms to fill out

Review the examples shown of forms that participants may expect to complete if the ICS is in place at the response. This list is not complete but will alert participants that documentation will be part of volunteering.

Summary and closing

Review the learning objectives.

Remind participants that the Participant Guide can be accessed at <https://mwc.umn.edu> where the links can be used to access resources.

Ask: Based on this training, what takeaways do you have as prepare to assist in another community?

List them on a writing surface viewable by all

Answer any remaining questions.

Participants will complete the evaluation form. Collect forms and thank all participants; provide certificate/documentation of training.

Facilitator Follow up

Make this exercise better:

Forward suggestions to UMN

Are there other 'Questions you may be asked' that should be included?

Organize the listing of 'takeaways' and forward to your program director. These are very important impacts to report to NIEHS.