

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

What is the Medical Reserve Corps?

The Medical Reserve Corps is a local voluntary organization addressing community health and medical needs. MRC Volunteers will be asked to supplement existing health care infrastructure in an emergency, staff alternate care or medication dispensing sites, or assist with a variety of other health-related activities.

Medical Reserve Corps is part of the national MRC system, which consists of more than 775 chapters throughout the country, and a national office that coordinates and assists local jurisdictions. For more information on MRC nationwide, visit MedicalReserveCorps.gov

Who can join the Medical Reserve Corps?

Anyone with a desire to help others is eligible to join the MRC. This includes health care professionals, practicing or retired, or any other resident who has an interest in health care and related issues. All potential volunteers must first complete the application process, which includes a background check, and registration as an emergency worker.

Why do we need a Medical Reserve Corps?

The first response to any disaster is a local response. This was evident during the 2007 flooding, and in the wake of this disaster many people responded by volunteering their talents and skills to help others. The MRC brings together local health professionals and others with health related skills to volunteer in their community. Volunteers will assist local health departments and local emergency response partners within Washington Region 3, by providing a group of readily trained and available resources to help our communities.

Why should I join?

MRC volunteers join for a variety of reasons. Most have a desire to help keep their community safe and healthy. Some become involved as an opportunity to get free training in disaster preparedness, and to be involved at the center of public health emergencies. Still others are looking for a way to meet others in the community with similar interests, and to work at community events such as fairs and other big events. Students often join the MRC as a way to network within the profession they'll soon be working in. Retired professionals participate as a way to keep involved with their profession, and to share all they've learned with others.

Do I have liability protection as a volunteer?

If you are registered as an emergency worker (which you must do as part of the application process), you will have significant liability protection under the state laws of Washington.

How do I join?

To start the process, fill out and return the volunteer application. The application should be returned to Katie de Rose at the Thurston County Public Health & Social Services Department (360-867-2522 or mrc@co.thurston.wa.us). You will be contacted for an interview. After completion of the interview process, MRC volunteers will need to complete their registration as an emergency worker and have a background check. When that information is received by the MRC office, volunteers will be added to the mailing list to receive general announcements, training information, and meeting invitations. In order to start participating in exercises and emergency response, you'll need to complete the basic training requirements and provide documentation to the MRC coordinator.

What are the MRC training requirements?

Everywhere in the United States, emergency responders must complete basic ICS (Incident Command System) and NIMS (National Incident Management System) courses. In order to become registered emergency workers and have liability protection, all MRC volunteers must complete these courses. We also request that members have Mental Health Disaster training. All MRC volunteers are also strongly recommended to get their basic first aid certification, and to participate in local emergency preparedness exercises. A number of other trainings will be offered to volunteers based on their interests and their evolving role in community emergency response. While these will not be required, they may be necessary to respond to certain types of emergencies.

How much of a time commitment is MRC membership?

The amount of time you invest in MRC can vary widely depending on the extent of your involvement. First, there are some basic training requirements (mentioned above) that all volunteers will be expected to fulfill. These can be completed online at your convenience. The MRC will meet bimonthly up to two hours. Several community response exercises will occur annually, and we ask that you choose to be involved depending on your availability. (Each exercise will require about one day of participation). Those activities compose the minimum amount of time you could invest and remain an effective MRC volunteer.

If you would like to get more involved, however, there are many ways to do so. Training opportunities will be frequent, and a variety of other disaster drills, community events, and major disasters elsewhere in the country will afford volunteers the chance to become more involved.