



## HEALTH NEWS FROM DR. YU

Thurston County Public Health & Social Services Department

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### Disasters, Emergency Preparedness and Volunteerism (MRC)

Prepared February 2010

Every time we hear about an earthquake or any other natural disaster, the images of death, despair, pain, and anguish flash across our TV or computer screens. The recent devastating earthquake in Haiti is still fresh in our minds, as well as the clamor for aid and assistance. An earthquake of the same magnitude in our area may not cause the same devastation but nevertheless, it is a good reminder that we need to be prepared.

Emergency preparedness needs to happen at all levels: for the home, the workplace and the community.

- Within the first 72 hours after a disaster or emergency, we have to rely on our own resources. This is the time we have to help ourselves because aid to our area cannot be mustered and mobilized that quickly.
- Once aid arrives, we must have the infrastructure to help determine where assistance is most needed.
- During an emergency situation it is best to stay off the phone and off the streets so emergency workers can have full access to those in need.

**The best place to start emergency preparedness is at home.** Knowing that your loved ones are safe and that you are prepared at home for an emergency or disaster is the first step when helping others. Now is a good time to review or establish a personal and family preparedness plan.

- For more information on disaster preparedness for your home, check out the emergency resource guide from the Department of Health: [www.doh.wa.gov/phepr/handbook.htm](http://www.doh.wa.gov/phepr/handbook.htm) or the local American Red Cross website: [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)

Our community is very caring and generous and many people want to help and volunteer in meaningful ways when they see others suffering. Many relief organizations require that volunteers register ahead of time, attend an orientation, go through a background check, and receive training to help in a disaster. Organizations dealing with licensed medical volunteers also have to make sure that their volunteers have the necessary credentials and are trained to help as part of a team. During past emergencies and disasters we have seen local volunteers deployed to areas outside our community for disaster response.

One unique opportunity to volunteer in Thurston County is with the **Thurston County Medical Reserve Corps (MRC)**. The Medical Reserve Corps is a group of medical and non-medical volunteers who respond in a public health capacity during an emergency or

following a disaster. Volunteers also help strengthen the community through ongoing training, public health education, and preparedness.

- If you wish to volunteer but have not yet signed up to do so, now is a good time to act on it. You may not be able to volunteer in Haiti but you can make a difference in Thurston County. We look forward to hearing from you.
- For more information about the Thurston County Medical Reserve Corps, contact Sue Poyner at 360.867.2551, or [poyners@co.thurston.wa.us](mailto:poyners@co.thurston.wa.us)

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