

Ohio Journal of
Environmental
Health

4th Quarter 2024

**Medical Reserve Corps: A
Valuable Resource for
Environmental Health**

In this issue...

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President's Message

Courtney Myers, MPH, REHS
Stark County Health Department

As we transition into fall, it's a time of change and growth for our organization. While transitions can sometimes be challenging, I am confident that OEHA is emerging stronger than ever. I'd like to take a moment to share some important updates and developments with you.



A Heartfelt Farewell to Vicki Johnson

In August, the OEHA Board accepted the resignation of Vicki Johnson, our longtime administrative aide, as she embarks on her well-deserved retirement. Vicki has been an invaluable asset to our organization for decades, and we are deeply grateful for her dedication and service. Please join me in wishing her all the best.

Leadership Changes and New Appointments

In October, we received notice from Dustin Kent, our 2024 Board President, that he would be stepping down from his role. We thank Dustin for his years of exceptional service to both OEHA and environmental health. With his departure, the Board voted to appoint me as President, effective immediately, with the understanding that I will serve through my previous appointment until April 2026. I am honored to take on this responsibility and am excited to continue working alongside such a talented and dedicated team.

A Strong, Supportive Leadership Team

I'm incredibly fortunate to be working with an outstanding Board that has made this

transition smooth and successful. I want to express my sincere gratitude to the OEHA Board, Committee Chairs, and Tony Brigano and Lauren Strope from Hicks Partners. Your support and guidance have been invaluable.

Fall Conferences and Leadership Course

This fall, our four districts hosted outstanding conferences, offering educational and networking opportunities for members across the state. Thank you to all District Directors and planning committees for their dedication in organizing these events.

OEHA's Membership and Professional Development Committee held the 2024 Leadership Course in November, designed for Registered Environmental Health Specialists with 3-5 years of experience. Nearly forty OEHA members from across the state participated in this valuable training, which was made possible by the Workforce Development Grant. Special thanks to the Membership Committee, led by Luke Jacobs and Carrie Yeager, for their hard work in bringing this initiative to life and the Delaware Public Health District for hosting the event.

New Administrative Support

In exciting news, OEHA has entered into a new contract for administrative services with Hicks Partners. We are pleased to welcome Lauren Strope as our new administrative aide. Lauren brings a wealth of experience and a strong background in public administration, having earned a master's degree in Political Science and a bachelor's in Public Administration from Miami University. Lauren is available to assist you with any membership

or administrative inquiries, and she will be the point of contact for all membership-related correspondence. We look forward to introducing her more fully in the upcoming Journal.

Looking Ahead: REHS Credential and Legislative Advocacy

As we look toward 2025, the future of the Registered Environmental Health Specialist (REHS) credential will be a top priority for OEHA. We anticipate discussions around licensure may take place within the state legislature, and we are already preparing for this important debate. Our newly formed Ad-Hoc Committee on Occupational Credential Review, supported by Tony Brigano and

Lauren Strope at Hicks Partners, is diligently gathering information to ensure we are well-prepared to advocate for the continued importance of our credential.

Wishing You a Happy Holiday Season

As we approach the winter season, I want to extend my warmest wishes for a joyful and restful holiday season to all of you. Thank you for your continued commitment to OEHA, and I look forward to what we will accomplish together in the year ahead.

In Your Service,
Courtney Myers, MPH, REHS
OEHA President

Welcome To Our New Administrative Aide!

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Medical Reserve Corps: A Valuable Resource for Environmental Health

Adam R. Howard, MPH, REHS
Delaware Public Health District

The Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) is a group of ready volunteers with a wide array of expertise. Often the MRC is thought of only in the context of medical emergencies such as the H1N1 or COVID-19 pandemics. During these emergencies, the MRC undoubtedly performed admirably, assisting local health districts (LHD), the community, and saving lives. They might have been assigned tasks such as giving vaccines, checking patients into clinics, or directing traffic in the parking lot. While these events show the hard work and difference the MRC can make in a medical emergency, the MRC can make a difference in all aspects of public health and environmental health.

Environmental health should take an active role in recruiting and engaging the local MRC units. Through these efforts, MRC members can become familiar with environmental health programs. By incorporating MRC members into routine tasks, the LHD positions itself to react in emergencies or times that require staffing surges. While not all scenarios may be appropriate for the use of the MRC, a creative LHD may find more uses for the MRC than initially thought possible by taking complex tasks and breaking them down into simple parts.

MRC is a ready resource for canvassing and education. In public health, there are times that call for an area to be canvassed, whether it be distributing or collecting information. In environmental health this could be after a case of mosquito-borne illness or even a spill. An engaged MRC can assist with these activities by providing those affected with the needed education or surveys to continually meet their needs and concerns. These tasks require significant effort but are ideal candidates for

the MRC. If corps members can alleviate this burden from the LHD, it will free up the time of the REHS to collect samples, manage containment, or evaluate the results of the questionnaires distributed.

Foodborne outbreaks have the potential to overwhelm when the number of ill patients exceeds staff capacity to interview. During these events, the MRC could be used to support foodborne illness interviews. Providing strong just-in-time training, could allow the MRC to help call patients and complete the foodborne illness interview form. This would free up the REHS and epidemiologists to analyze the information, perform inspections, collect samples, and support operators.

There doesn't need to be an emergency to call upon the MRC. Walking surveys of neighborhoods can provide valuable information to help develop tailored education campaigns. An example of this might be surveys looking for mosquito breeding sites. This can seem like a time intensive task; however, if the MRC is used for the task, the results can be obtained while requiring



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significantly less staff time. This information can then be used to make impactful messages on issues occurring within the community. Not only does this prove cost effective, but it also builds relationships with the MRC members by providing meaningful missions for the MRC to engage in. These nonemergency missions will help build trust and camaraderie so that the corps is ready in emergencies.

A Case Study of a Tornado Touchdown: MRC as a Force Multiplier

In March of 2024, a tornado system traveled through Ohio causing damage throughout the State. In response to a request for mutual aid in Logan County, Delaware Public Health District sent 2 emergency response personnel to Logan County to help with spontaneous volunteers. At the same time, Delaware County was ramping up a response for two smaller tornados that damaged its community affecting 7 political subdivisions. While these tornados were not as severe or deadly as the tornado in Logan County, they

still caused enough property damage to receive a major disaster declaration from FEMA, as they affected over 250 homes with at least 25 homes sustaining major structural damage.

In Delaware County the EMA established a rapid response effort with public safety and social services for the residents of the community. Within approximately 12 hours of the tornados' touchdowns, EMA called upon the Health District for assistance. County agencies were working to remove debris and connect families with resources. Delaware Public Health District was assigned to help coordinate debris management; staff the damage intake center; and provide vaccines, birth certificates, and other resources at a multiagency resource center.

One aspect of the response that neither EMA, the County, nor the Health District had adequate staffing to operationalize was the damage intake center. The center was intended to be operated 7 days a week for 6 hours each day and a mission request was sent out to the MRC. Within 24 hours of the request the first MRC members deployed to the Emergency

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Corps members received just-in-time training as they entered the EOC to prepare them for the tasks of the day. During their deployments at the EOC, MRC members' focus was to staff the damage intake center to take damage reports. These reports were crucial to EMA's efforts to manage the situation. The reports helped EMA determine what needs existed in the community. Based on the identified needs, EMA was then able to target the specific organizations that could supply that type of assistance and steer them to the areas of the community that needed the service (e.g. if there were many downed tree reports, EMA could focus on working with companies that cut trees and send them to the zip code affected). Additionally, for a tornado, these reports began to help shape the path of the tornado in mapping software.

With the MRC taking the damage intake information, the County agencies were able to focus on life safety, debris management, standing up a multiagency resource center, and connecting residents with services and supplies. In all, the MRC provided 63 hours of service over 7 days and 20 deployments. Their rapid deployment and assistance resulted in accolades from EMA who declared the MRC a "Force Multiplier" and recognized the MRC's

ability to rapidly deploy as a strength of the response in the subsequent after action report.

Medical Reserve Corps units are a valuable community resource. They are positioned to support Health Districts with a variety of tasks including those in environmental health. Taking the time to train and prepare a unit may seem like a drain on resources, but having a well-trained response ready corps will prove valuable when emergencies occur, or an influx of staffing is needed.

At the heart of the MRC is the yearning to volunteer. Volunteers want to feel like their efforts are making a difference in their community. Environmental Health is a great place to provide these opportunities. Engage your MRC. Discuss your thoughts on how you would like to incorporate them with your MRC coordinator. Do they want to shadow during an inspection? Can you accommodate this? If so, it will bring corps and staff together to gain familiarity before an event occurs. By reimagining the possibilities of the Medical Reserve Corps into a public health reserve corps we can strengthen both the corps and local public health which will ultimately strengthen the health of all our communities and Ohio.

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Association of Ohio Health Commissioners
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Educational Opportunities

- AOHC New Employee Training - Mach 12, 2025; Delaware, Ohio
- AOHC LEHDS - March 18-19, 2025; Dublin, Ohio
- AOHC Finance For Health Departments - March 18-19, 2025; Dublin, Ohio
- OEHA AEC - April 10-11, 2025; Columbus, Ohio
- Ohio Public Health Conference - April 28-30, 2025; Lewis Center, Ohio
- AOHC Health Commissioner University - May 20-22, 2025; Dublin, Ohio

Farewell

Vicki Johnson

Vicki Johnson, long time Administrative Aide for the Ohio Environmental Health Association announced her retirement this past August. Vicki served OEHA for many years. During this time she was often the first contact new members had with our Association. She always provided a warm greeting and welcoming presence whether it was handling membership questions, conference registrations, or reviewing continuing education requests. She was very thorough and maintained decades of membership records in a manner that information can easily be accessed and reviewed. She worked very closely with numerous Treasurers over the years to assure that we maintained good financial records and met all audit and tax criteria. Vicki also served as an informal historian for OEHA and would readily provide perspective and information to the Board of Directors upon request for topics that needed a historical lens.

Her dedication to the Association and all of its members was second to none. She will certainly be missed, but never forgotten. We are all better for the contribution that Vicki made and we would like to extend a sincere thank you and best wishes in retirement!



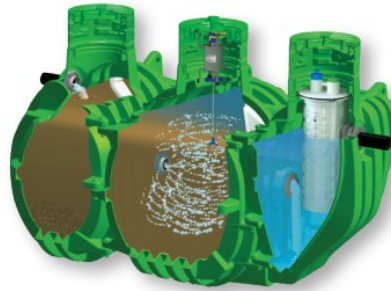
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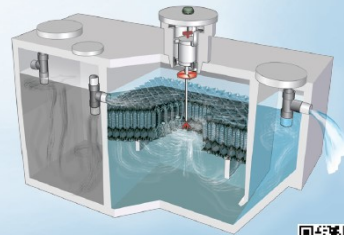
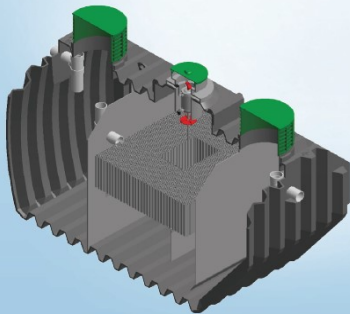
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