

7-17-09 Center for Domestic Preparedness

How often do health agents, emt's, fire fighters, police officers, public works department, doctors and nurses meet in the same room to talk about emergency preparedness? Maybe the answer is "Not frequently enough."

We're all busy with our own day-to-day obligations and that makes it difficult to attend classes for future possibilities with a may-or-may-not classification when it comes to degree of inevitability.

All emergency responders recognize the need to train and be informed but we also recognize the need to choose wisely when it comes to time commitments and budget. We are always on the lookout for a class offering hands-on training, excellent presenters and an affordable price. And you know what? I recently found a gem of a training center, free of cost to local and state responders from ten disciplines: emergency management, emergency medical service, fire service, governmental administrative, hazardous materials, healthcare, law enforcement, public health, public safety communications and public works.

That's right, a gem. And it is, admittedly, difficult to share a good thing when the sharing might reduce one's future chances of being a recipient of the good thing. I am convinced, however, of the training center's desire and ability to offer more classes. So, here goes. I am going to share.

Last week I attended a class on environmental health with other health agents, police officers and fire fighters. The class was one of several offered that week at our nation's Center for Domestic Preparedness (CDP) in Anniston, Alabama. The CDP is operated by the United States Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). I admit that these titles are not only a mouthful but also a tad intimidating for a small town health agent. I may have been skeptical and intimidated when I was applying but those concerns disappeared when I was welcomed to this class as much as the police officers and fire fighters were. I may not be a first responder to many emergencies but public health is still an emergency responder, quite often being called in as the first-and-one-half responder. The classic example is this: The fire is out and now the board of health needs to decide if the building is safe to reoccupy or the air safe to breathe

So it was with respect and appreciation that I discovered the CDP's offerings are interdisciplinary. And don't we need that variety and meeting of disciplines in real life situations? The course topics covered many environmental situations and factors affecting public health. Topics such as food and water safety, vector control, responder safety and shelter management are all areas of concern to a health agent but it was so helpful to have them presented by engaging instructors from a variety of disciplines. Some of them were downright talented at story telling and comic relief. This was all a relief, indeed, compared to the frequently encountered "death by power point".

I took this class with 46 other people from all over the country. It was fun being among my peers. We washed hands and used paper towels to open bathroom doors! We all participated in the class and learned, even enjoying ourselves along the way. Our learning was measured by a pre and post-test and, yes, mine indicated that I learned.

The list of course offerings at the CDP is too numerous to list in its entirety here but includes the following: Weapons of Mass Destruction (several, such as Respiratory

Protection), Managing Civil Actions in Threat Incidents, (such as Protestor Devices), Incident Command System, several Train the Trainer, Advanced Public Information Officer and Pandemic Influenza Planning and Preparedness.

So spread the word to your Police, Fire, Health, Accounting (Who's going to track all those finances during the emergency?) and Public Works Departments, your local doctors and emergency room staff. This training is free of charge and is high caliber, making it well worth your time.

One more thing to consider: It is not only a privilege to be accepted for this training, once there, your confidence grows, in yourself and your country. That is a much needed outcome even if it is not immediately measured by a post test.

For additional information about the CDP's training programs, visit cdp.dhs.gov

Cathleen Drinan is the health agent for the Town of Halifax, MA. During her visit she read a sign stating, "Alabama, The Beautiful Welcome" and it was. New Englanders could learn from their polite, courteous, friendly ways.

Questions on the training? Feel free to contact Cathleen at 781 293 6768 or cdrinan@town.halifax.ma.us