

Dear Mental Health Professional:

During a large scale disaster most mental health professionals want to help to the extent they are able to respond. However, when disaster strikes, taking time to recruit, train and contact volunteers really impede the response effectiveness. Thus, having an identified group of local disaster responders who have some basic training in mental health response is highly desirable for community emergency planning.

The St. Clair County Mental Health Board in concert with Belleville Memorial Hospital (the area multi-county coordinating hospital,) and Chestnut Health Systems has offered annual free continuing education disaster training for those interested in assisting in major local disasters since 2004. Over 300 professionals who have attended training plus those responding to recruitment efforts to be potential responders are included in a database and telephone tree. Education, license, disaster mental health training attended and contact information are recorded for pre-certification as a responder within Illinois Region 4, a 60 square mile area surrounding Belleville. The total database information is available to more extensively trained Team Leaders who can certify, provide just in time training and direct the mental health disaster volunteers and assist in on-going emergency planning. The mental health disaster Region 4 database is maintained in the St. Clair County Mental Health Board office. Other counties may also have volunteer groups.

There are other emergency response groups that volunteers may join such as Medical Reserve Corps, Red Cross, CERT, etc. All responders are expected to function consistent with National Incident Management System and command organization. We also respond in cooperation with the county Emergency Management Agency.

Deployment of volunteers will vary depending upon type and severity of disaster. In 2011 we initiated use of metropolitan St. Louis E-Sponder communication system for our area. Emails and telephone calls to volunteers can be sent to registrants to request volunteers; reply to request may or may not be asked. If communication systems are reduced, a call-out will be broadcast on emergency radio.

Mental Health volunteers are expected to be familiar with psychological first aid response with victims and responders and how to collaborate with other providers during the crisis phase. Training for longer term intervention and treatment may be offered later. Further information about deployment guidelines and response is available at training events. See website for additional information at www.stc708.org. Please join our dedicated community professionals by registering as a disaster mental health volunteer.