

# Indiana's Veterinary Medical Reserve Corps (VMRC/ASERT)

## **Indiana: Leading the Way in Planning for Animals**

In 1995, Indiana became the first state in the nation to include animals as part of the state's official emergency management plan for floods, tornadoes, and other large-scale disasters. What began as the SAVE (State Annex for Veterinary Emergencies) program evolved into the Animal Surveillance Emergency Response Team (ASERT) to address needs for high-consequence animal health emergencies. Today Indiana maintains a registered Veterinary Medical Reserve Corps (VMRC) that supports coordination of efforts to evacuate, rescue, treat and shelter animals in distress. BOAH manages the VMRC team roster in cooperation with the Indiana Department of Health, as a unique public-private partnership. VMRC may interface with numerous local, state, and federal agencies.

## **Who can join the Indiana VMRC?**

Veterinarians and veterinary technicians licensed in Indiana, veterinary assistants, animal control personnel and individuals with hands-on experience in kennels or shelters may apply to be a part of the Indiana VMRC. Members do not need any prior disaster response experience or training to join.

## **What is it like to be part of the Indiana VMRC?**

The mission of the Indiana VMRC is to serve the citizens of Indiana as an organized team of animal health volunteers who supply veterinary and animal care skills, knowledge, and expertise in support of animal-related all-hazards response to emergencies and disasters, including high-consequence disease and natural or man-made events. BOAH strives to identify, develop, and provide relevant training tools and resources for members, including opportunities to exercise and train, while encouraging community involvement. Team members may be involved in a number of efforts including assisting during natural disasters, local planning efforts and animal health emergencies.

## **Natural Disasters**

An important function of emergency management is the orderly and coordinated response to situations by volunteers and responders who are rostered (registered) with the state and respond under direction of the lead agency. Membership with Indiana's VMRC brings rostered individuals into that system. BOAH, in coordination with Indiana Department of Homeland Security, serves as the lead agency for response to animals in disasters. BOAH maintains the VMRC roster.

In the event of a natural disaster such as a flood, tornado or winter storm, team members may be asked to perform a variety of necessary disaster-related tasks, including:

- Rescue and capture stranded or abandoned animals;
- Treat and triage injured animals;
- Feed and house displaced animals as part of temporary shelters; and
- Identify and reunite animals separated from their owners.

The VMRC could be called upon to respond anywhere in the state of Indiana. Individually, a member may be called upon to serve within a district, by a state or

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local government agency during an emergency. Deployment is always voluntary. VMRC team members can participate at whatever level works for them during an event—assistants are needed as well as leaders. In special circumstances, Indiana VMRC veterinarians could be asked to assist/provide some medical services to human patients.

### **Local Planning**

VMRC team members may have the opportunity to work with local officials in planning and preparing for disasters affecting animals at the county or district level. This involves attending local emergency management meetings and working with first responders to develop plans for handling animals during emergencies at the county level. VMRC team members may have the opportunity to educate pet and livestock owners about the need to prepare for disasters. Animal owners bear the ultimate responsibility for caring for their pets and livestock before, during and after a disaster.

### **Animal Health Emergencies**

VMRC team members may be asked to assist BOAH with disease detection and response during high-consequence disease situations. VMRC volunteers must be trained on proper donning and doffing of personal protective equipment and be respirator mask fit-tested before responding to an animal health emergency.

During a large-scale animal health emergency BOAH may call upon VMRC team members to help contain and/or eradicate a disease threat, such as highly pathogenic avian influenza.

### **Other examples of possible missions/roles include:**

- Promote public and client education and awareness about disaster preparedness
- Assist with local animal welfare situations
- Provide guidance to government policy makers
- Pilot use of new technologies

Within each of these areas, VMRC team members may be called upon for many tasks such as animal care and treatment, evacuation, vaccination, specimen collection, decontamination, euthanasia, necropsy, collecting epidemiological information, supervisory or office support.

### **Training and Exercise Opportunities**

VMRC team members will be invited to participate in training specific to emergency response, including classes, online courses and even local, district and state exercise events. These opportunities will help team members understand and apply concepts and situations that are related to a disease beyond just animal health and care tasks.

### **We would love to have you join the IN VMRC!**

To be part of the Indiana VMRC, complete the form available online: [www.in.gov/boah/disaster-preparedness-overview](http://www.in.gov/boah/disaster-preparedness-overview) Then, email the completed form to: [animalhealth@boah.in.gov](mailto:animalhealth@boah.in.gov)

You will receive a confirmation 'Welcome!' email with a link to Serv-IN, the state's official rostering database for volunteers. BOAH will also provide additional training and information resources.