



For Immediate Release

Contact: Ann Becker, R.N., B.S.N., UMass Amherst MRC • (413) 577-5193
Brian Olsen, UMass Amherst emergency manager • (413) 545-7431

April 17, 2009

Emergency drill showcases campus, community readiness

AMHERST, Mass. – In what one evaluator called "the most advanced exercise I've seen in the country," UMass Amherst campus and community partners demonstrated their readiness to respond to a mass casualty emergency.

Led by the UMass Amherst Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) and the campus' Emergency Management office, the April 16 emergency drill brought together more than 300 volunteers in a simulation of decontamination, mass care and sheltering activities. The drill scenario involved an accidental ammonia discharge on the university campus. Airborne ammonia can cause burning of the eyes, nose and throat; high-level exposure can be fatal.

Some 165 volunteer "victims" were bussed in groups to the rear of the Mullins Center, where they traded "contaminated" street clothes for red plastic gowns. Entering a portable decontamination unit, they showered and changed into green garments indicating readiness for medical attention. The highly organized effort processed all victims within an hour and a half.

Moving inside the Mullins Center, victims were met by triage volunteers, who identified and prioritized medical and mental health needs, and directed them to aid stations on the arena floor. After treatment, participants gathered in a temporary shelter area equipped with cots, refreshments and information. Trained evaluators watched as the event unfolded; their observations will become part of the university's ongoing preparedness planning.

Participants included MRC members; University Health Services medical and mental health staff; representatives from the campus' Environmental Health and Safety, transit and police departments; School of Nursing students and faculty; student emergency medical technicians; and members of the Reserve Officer Training Corps. Community partners include the Amherst Fire Department, American Red Cross, Hampshire County MRC, Amherst College and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

The drill was funded through an \$11,500 grant from the Western Massachusetts Regional Homeland Security Advisory Council. The UMass Amherst MRC and Emergency Management office co-wrote a proposal for the competitive grant, receiving the award early in 2009.