



HIDALGO COUNTY

**Medical
Reserve
Corps**

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

Table of Contents

<u>Welcome</u>	04
<u>Program Contact Information</u>	05
<u>Online Resources</u>	05
<u>History and Purpose</u>	06
<u>Overview of MRC</u>	07
<u>Hidalgo County MRC</u>	08
<u>Mission Statement</u>	09
<u>Goals</u>	09
<u>Objectives</u>	09
<u>Structure</u>	10
<u>MRC Membership Requirements</u>	10
<u>Applicant Disqualification Criteria</u>	11
<u>Types of Volunteer Service</u>	12
<u>Scope of Volunteer Activity</u>	13
<u>Volunteering Levels</u>	13
<u>Training</u>	14
<u>Volunteer Time Sheets</u>	15
<u>Communication</u>	15

Table of Contents

Hidalgo County MRC Code of Conduct	16
Confidentiality	17
Harassment, Discrimination, Substance Use, & Violence	17
Dress Code	18
Liability and Workers Compensation	18
Activation/Deployment	19
Fitness for Duty	19
Disciplinary Action	20
Termination of Membership	20
Discontinuation of Membership	20
Be Informed	20
Staying Prepared	21

Welcome to the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC)

Dear Hidalgo County Medical Reserve Corps Volunteer,

On behalf of the Hidalgo County MRC, welcome and thank you for joining our team and making the MRC part of your volunteer activities.

Our MRC is a community-based program designed to develop a trained team of medical and non-medical volunteers who are willing to contribute their skills and expertise to the community. Our efforts ensure that we are all better equipped to prepare for and respond to a wide range of emergencies.

The MRC offers flexibility in participation and commitment with three levels of involvement Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced. Remaining active requires completing level-specific trainings, participating in one exercise each year, and attending the yearly refresher training.

This handbook was created to give you important information about volunteering and functions as a guide for MRC Volunteers.

For each volunteer opportunity you participate in, there will be more specific policies and procedures regarding your role. You will learn much of the information regarding your specific responsibilities “on-the-job.”

Please take the time to read this handbook carefully. The handbook should serve as a reference to use when you have questions or concerns, but please feel free to contact us directly for additional information or comments. We value your suggestions, comments, and professionalism to improve the coordination and response of our members to emergencies and other public health issues.

Once again, thank you and welcome to the Hidalgo County Medical Reserve Corps!

Sincerely,

Hidalgo County MRC

Program Contact Information

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Online Resources

Hidalgo County Medical Reserve Corps
<http://www.hchd.org/258/Medical-Reserve-Corps-MRC>

Texas Disaster Volunteer Registry
<https://www.texasdisastervolunteerregistry.org/>

Texas Medical Reserve Corps
www.dshs.texas.gov/commprep/TexasMRC.aspx

National Medical Reserve Corps
www.aspr.hhs.gov/MRC/

Train Texas
<https://www.train.org/texas/welcome>

MRC Train
www.train.org/mrc

Congress Gov
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/105th-congress/senate-bill/543/text>

ASPR Preparedness & Response
<https://aspr.hhs.gov/legal/PREPact/pages/default.aspx>

NACCHO
<https://www.naccho.org/programs/public-health-preparedness/medical-reserve-corps>

History and Purpose

There was an outpouring of support for the emergency relief efforts after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Many Americans asked, “What can I do to help?” Medical and public health professionals were among those who wanted to volunteer their services. It was soon discovered that using medical-related volunteers in emergencies requires a careful and organized approach. Although they may have had the necessary medical skills and knowledge, they could not be used because there was no way to systematically identify and credential them in advance. In addition, there was neither sufficient time nor capability to accomplish these tasks in the aftermath of the attacks.

The anthrax attacks in the fall of 2001 reinforced the need for pre-identified and trained supplemental healthcare personnel to assist with public health emergency operations such as mass antibiotic dispensing or mass immunizations. During the anthrax response, medication was provided to almost 40,000 individuals, which tested the capabilities of the current medical personnel available. If the event had been much larger, the responders may have been overwhelmed and additional personnel would have been needed.

From these tragedies, the USA Freedom Corps was established to provide Americans with meaningful opportunities to serve. The USA Freedom Corps became the umbrella agency for the existing organizations of AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and Peace Corps. The newly organized Citizen Corps joined these well-established volunteer organizations.

Citizen Corps was created with the primary purpose of coordinating volunteer activities that will make our communities safer, more resilient, and better prepared to respond to any emergency situation. The different organizations within the Citizen Corps provide opportunities for people to participate, depending on their skills and personal interests, in a range of organizations to make their families, their homes, and their communities safer from the threats of crime, terrorism, and disasters of all kinds.

Citizen Corps offers citizens the opportunity to volunteer through the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC), Neighborhood Watch, Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT), Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS), and Fire Corps.

The Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) plays an integral part in the overall preparedness and response strategy. It provides a way for citizens to offer their skills and expertise during public health emergencies, as well as promote preparedness throughout the year.

Pre-identifying, training, and organizing volunteer medical, non-medical, and public health professionals to strengthen their communities, is the core of the MRC concept. With the MRC in place, a formerly untapped community resource is available to the community in emergencies and ongoing efforts in public health.

Overview of Medical Reserve Corps

The Medical Reserve Corps is a partner program of Citizen Corps, a national network of volunteers dedicated to ensuring hometown security. Citizen Corps, along with the Corporation for National and Community Service, and the Peace Corps are all part of the President's USA Freedom Corps, which promotes volunteerism and service throughout the nation. The Medical Reserve Corps was founded after President Bush's 2002 State of the Union Address, in which he asked all Americans to volunteer in support of their country. The MRC is housed under the Office of the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response (ASPR) within the United States Department of Health and Human Services.



MRC units are community-based and function to locally organize and utilize volunteers. Our volunteers may be medical or non-medical professionals who want to donate their time and expertise to promote healthy living throughout the year and to prepare for and respond to emergencies. MRC volunteers supplement existing local emergency and public health resources.

MRC volunteer professionals vary in occupations and skills. Volunteers may include medical and public health professionals such as physicians, nurses, pharmacists, dentists, veterinarians, and epidemiologists. Other non-medical members are needed such as interpreters, chaplains, office workers, legal advisors, mental health counselors, and engineers who can fill other vital MRC support positions.

Hidalgo County MRC

Hidalgo County is the 15th largest county in the state of Texas, spanning 1,571.2 square miles and home to more than over 860,000 residents.



The location that an MRC member may respond to is not necessarily pre-determined, but may be inside or outside the volunteer's home area. Since an emergency may only affect part of an area, members may have the opportunity to serve in one of the other cities in the lower Rio Grande Valley, if the need arises and if available to deploy.

Additionally, there are eleven public health districts in Texas with each region having varying amounts of MRC Volunteer programs. Situations may also arise where we are asked to help serve in the other health district areas.



Mission Statement

The Hidalgo County MRC is committed to fortifying the resilience of the community through a comprehensive and collaborative approach. The primary mission is to engage and equip local volunteers with the essential skills and knowledge needed to provide crucial support during times of disaster. By fostering a culture of preparedness and proactive involvement, the Hidalgo County MRC aims to create a group of dedicated individuals capable of reinforcing public health response capabilities in Hidalgo County. The enduring commitment is to build a resilient community that can effectively navigate and respond to a spectrum of public health-related challenges, ensuring the safety and well-being of Hidalgo County residents in the face of adversity.

Goal

The goal of the Hidalgo County MRC is to strategically deploy proficient and well-trained volunteers, encompassing both medical and non-medical expertise, to provide timely and effective assistance during public health emergencies. This includes not only immediate response efforts but also active participation in ongoing preparedness activities within Hidalgo County. By ensuring the readiness and adaptability of our dedicated volunteer force, we aim to enhance the overall resilience of our community and contribute significantly to the mitigation and management of public health challenges.

Objectives

The Hidalgo County MRC is dedicated to achieving several key objectives aligned with public health priorities and emergency response. Our objectives include:

- **Promoting Public Health Priorities:** Our commitment extends to advancing key public health priorities, emphasizing disease prevention, improving health literacy, eliminating health disparities, and bolstering overall preparedness for public health challenges.
- **Strengthening Emergency Response Capability:** Enhancing the medical and emergency response capability, as well as the surge capacity of Hidalgo County, to ensure a robust and effective response to various emergencies.
- **Supporting Mass Dispensing Efforts:** Providing trained volunteers to assist in the mass dispensing of medications or vaccines during public health emergencies, contributing to rapid and efficient distribution to the community.
- **Attracting Diverse Professionals:** Attracting and training professionals from diverse healthcare and non-healthcare disciplines, fostering a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to support Hidalgo County.
- **Coordinated Volunteer Response:** Coordinating a unified and efficient response effort by mobilizing volunteer professionals from various medical and non-medical disciplines during emergencies, ensuring a collaborative and effective approach to crisis management.

Structure

The Hidalgo County MRC is funded by two public health organizations, (1) Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response (ASPR), and (2) Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS). Both ASPR and DSHS have required capabilities that the Hidalgo County MRC must meet to prove the funding supports community readiness. The Hidalgo County MRC Unit is overseen by Hidalgo County Health and Human Services by and through the Public Health Emergency Preparedness Division who manages the volunteers, applications, and training opportunities.

The MRC unit leadership contact information can be found on page 5.

MRC Membership Requirements

- Be a citizen of the United States of America, a noncitizen national of the United States, a lawful permanent resident or an alien authorized to work in the U.S.
- Reside or work in or near Hidalgo County.
- Be at least 18 years of age.
- Complete a Texas Disaster Volunteer Registry (TDVR) profile and update the appropriate sections of the profile yearly (<https://texasdisastervolunteerregistry.org/>)
 - Professional licenses should be updated in the “Occupations” section any time that there is a change or an expiration.
- Complete the Hidalgo County MRC application, Volunteer General Release and Confidentiality Agreement, and any other documentation required by the County MRC and/or the Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Department.
 - Provide current professional licensure information (if applicable) and renewal dates
- Agree to and successfully pass a comprehensive background investigation.
- Participate in at least one exercise annually.
- Agree to participate in yearly training as a refresher
- Pick up an MRC photo identification badge from Hidalgo County Health & Human Services Department.
 - Business hours are Monday – Friday, 8:00 am – 4:30 pm
 - A form of photo identification (driver’s license or other government issued identification) is required to receive a badge.
- Attend and complete an online or in-person Hidalgo County MRC orientation.

MRC volunteers understand that the Hidalgo County MRC will collect and review information regarding potential and current volunteers in relation to the MRC program. Once an MRC member has received his/her badge and completed the orientation, he/she will be able to participate in disaster deployment training and exercises through the Hidalgo County Medical Reserve Corps. Applicants must meet ALL membership requirements for acceptance and participation in Hidalgo County MRC at the discretion of the Health and Human Services Department.

Applicant Disqualification Criteria

Criminal history does not automatically disqualify an applicant. Each situation is evaluated on a case-by-case basis. The following are examples of conduct which may disqualify an applicant or member from participating in the Hidalgo County MRC:

- Intentional falsification of information on the application.
- Felony conviction within the last 10 years.
- Conviction or pending criminal prosecution for offenses involving intent to physically harm a person or animal (misdemeanor or felony), including but not limited to assault, battery, or family violence.
- Conviction or pending criminal prosecution for sexual misconduct or sexual offenses (misdemeanor or felony).
- Legal designation as a sexual predator or sex offender.
- Crimes of moral turpitude, at the discretion of the MRC Program Coordinator. Examples recognized by Texas courts include, but are not limited to:
 - Aggravated assault by a man on a woman
 - Bank fraud
 - Communicating a false alarm
 - Failure to identify (providing false information)
 - Failure to stop and render aid
 - Indecent exposure
 - Lying to a police officer (filing a false report)
 - Mail fraud
 - Murder
 - Prostitution
 - Public lewdness
 - Purchase of a child
 - Sexual assault of a child
 - Swindling
 - Tax evasion
 - Theft (of any level, including shoplifting)
- Conviction or pending criminal prosecution involving possession of controlled substances, prescription drug fraud, forging/altering prescriptions, or filling prescriptions without authorization.
- Conviction or pending criminal prosecution for practicing medicine without a license.
- Ongoing Compliance
 - MRC volunteers must comply with all applicable sections of the Hidalgo County MRC Handbook.
 - Volunteers are required to notify the MRC Coordinator within 48 hours of any arrest, via phone or email.
 - The MRC Coordinator has the discretion to terminate MRC membership based on the factors above and the specifics of the situation.

Types of Volunteer Service

Roles and responsibilities depend on the member's expertise, interest, and training. All volunteer service with the MRC Program is optional depending on the volunteer's experience and interest. Below is just a snapshot of the types of activities in which MRC Volunteers may be involved.

During an Emergency

- Medical-related Volunteer
- Prophylaxis (immunization and dispensing medications)
- Clinic preparation (fill syringes, measure medications, etc.)
- Interviews for patient/client history
- First responder (initial assessment and vital signs)
- Triage
- Treatment
- Health education
- Phone screening and consulting
- Distribution of medications and supplies from SNS (Strategic National Stockpile)
- Communicable disease control measures
- Supporting health needs of vulnerable populations
- Integration with local, regional, and statewide initiatives ☐ Shelter care
- Non-Medical Volunteer
- Patient intake (distributing forms, assisting clients with forms, etc.)
- Information/communication
- People movers/crowd control
- Interpreters
- Amateur radio operators
- General administrative tasks
- Record keeping/data management
- Providing comfort to those affected

Non-Emergency

- Medical and Non-Medical Volunteers
- Assist with vaccination clinics
- Staff community preparedness fairs
- Participate in preparedness training and exercises
- Assist with general administrative projects
- Assist with providing health education to community groups .

Scope of Volunteer Activity

The safety and well-being of our MRC volunteers is the first priority during any MRC related activity. To ensure safety and well-being, MRC volunteers are given roles that best fit their skill sets and experience.

Medical Volunteers

For volunteers with medical training and experience, the scope of the volunteer's clinical work is determined by law. Some restrictions on this scope of practice may be changed in the event of a public health emergency, and volunteers will be notified and trained in the event that the scope of their work changes.

The status of a volunteer's professional license may also affect the scope of activity. Any changes in a volunteer's licensure status (for example, license expiration) must be reported to the Unit Leader prior to volunteering in a medical capacity. Failure to do so may result in termination of the volunteer relationship.

Some training exercises and real events do not require medical volunteers. A volunteer with a medical background is always welcome to participate in activities as a nonmedical volunteer.

Non-Medical Volunteers

For volunteers without specific medical training and experience, the scope of work is determined by the type of activity where volunteers are needed, whether it is an emergency or a non-emergency event.

The volunteer's specific role will be determined by the leadership of the emergency response activity or by HCHHSD. There are many volunteer opportunities for people without a medical background, especially in times of emergency.

Volunteering Levels

MRC will offer flexibility and allow volunteers to choose their desired level of participation and commitment. MRC members can decide how much time they are able to donate to the organization depending on their personal time constraints. The three levels of commitment and the training requirements associated with each are provided in the table below.

Basic Level

Basic Level members may respond to disasters and are required to attend at least one yearly drill, training, or meeting. The mandatory training requirement below must be completed within one year of becoming a member.

- Hidalgo County Medical Reserve Corps Orientation (Online)
- FEMA Incident Command System (ICS)
- ICS 100 (Online)
- ICS 700 (Online)

Intermediate Level

Intermediate Level members should plan to attend at least three trainings or meetings per year. Basic Level training is required, and members should acquire the additional training listed below.

- FEMA Incident Command System (ICS)
- ICS 200 (Online)
- ICS 800 (Online)
- Medical Countermeasures Awareness for Public Health Emergencies (Online)

Advanced Level

Advanced Level membership includes a leadership role. At this level, members should plan to attend at least one drill and five meetings per year. Basic and Intermediate Level training courses are required, and members should acquire the additional training courses listed below.

- Weapons of Mass Destruction (Online)
- Strategic National Stockpile Overview Course (Online)

Training

Training provides volunteers with the knowledge and skills necessary to perform their work effectively, safely, and with confidence. It also provides the HCHHSD with clear documentation that the volunteer was provided with the information that they needed to carry out their duties competently.

The Hidalgo County MRC Program provides training for volunteers in a variety of methods. Some methods of training, such as Just-in-Time Training (JITT), are used primarily during emergency response operations or large-scale exercises. Other methods of training are listed below.

Modes of delivering training include:

- Short briefings – as included in our “Just-in-Time” project specific training
- Classroom instruction
- Workshops
- Exercises – drills, tabletop, functional, and full-scale
- Self-paced online courses

**All training courses are offered at no cost to MRC Volunteers.*

Volunteer Training Platform

Volunteers are required to participate in an online learning platform called MRC TRAIN. The national MRC internet learning platform can be found at www.train.org/mrc.

Volunteers and Unit Leaders can find content on a variety of subjects to gain additional knowledge online. Hidalgo County MRC encourages members who seek learning resources to use MRC TRAIN.

Volunteer Time Sheets

As part of our grant requirements, MRC volunteers are asked to track all training and volunteer time by submitting a volunteer time sheet. After the volunteer has completed a training, the volunteer should save the certificate, if available, as a PDF and email it to the Unit Leader. Within 3 days of training completion, a time sheet can be filled out using the time sheet linked at the bottom of the main Hidalgo County webpage. Please be sure to always fill out the event location. As a volunteer, if you are completing a training virtually, please use the address where you are physically located at the time of the training (your home, work, etc. address). All training, virtual and in-person, and other volunteer hours require a time sheet, unless otherwise stated by the Unit Leader.

Communication

We make every effort to stay in regular contact with all MRC members and utilize a variety of methods to distribute information. Methods of communication are listed below. These methods will vary depending on the situation (ongoing interactions versus a formal call-out for an emergency situation). No volunteer’s contact information will be shared for non-MRC purposes or without that person’s explicit consent.

- Email will be used as a primary form of communication for members.
- Everbridge may be used as a notification and activation system.
- Texas Disaster Volunteer Registry (TDVR) also has a messaging option that may be used by HCMRC as well as other members of the MRC network.
- Volunteers may be required to utilize personal cell phones and communications app(s) if necessary.

Hidalgo County MRC Code of Conduct

All volunteers of the Hidalgo County MRC Program shall meet the following standards of conduct.

As a Hidalgo County MRC Volunteer, I shall:

- Put safety FIRST in all MRC activities and always promote safe work practices.
- Dress appropriately for the job assignment and environment.
- Follow the guidelines of Incident Command System (ICS).
- Accept the chain of command and respect each other regardless of position.
- Adhere to the Hidalgo County dress code policy.
- Always wear an MRC photo identification badge.
- Always follow all procedures to the best of my ability.
- Reveal any potential or actual conflicts of interest as they arise.
- Respect and use all equipment appropriately.
- Maintain confidentiality according to the Volunteer General Release & Confidentiality Agreement.
- Remain within my professional scope of practice. Maintain and abide by the standards of my profession, including licensure, certification, and/or training.
- Maintain a high level of honesty and transparency while performing volunteer duties.
- Report injuries, illnesses, and accidents to the appropriate staff member immediately.
- Refer any request from the media for information or comments directly to my direct supervisor, project lead, Public Information Officer (PIO), or Unit Leader.
- Refrain from carrying weapons to a deployment.
- Avoid situations that involve conflicts of interest and refrain from actions that may be perceived as such.
- Respect the cultures, beliefs, opinions, and decisions of others.
- Treat others with courtesy, sensitivity, tact, consideration, and humility.

As a Hidalgo County MRC Volunteer, I shall not:

- Self-deploy as a Hidalgo County MRC member in any situation.
- Act in the capacity of an MRC Volunteer at any time without prior authorization/deployment from the Hidalgo County MRC Program.
- Use Hidalgo County MRC or any partner agency/organization equipment or resources for personal use.
- Solicit, in any form (requesting money, support, or participation), for products, groups, organizations, or causes which are unrelated to MRC volunteering.
- Accept or seek any financial advantage or gain because of my affiliation with the Hidalgo County MRC; this includes selling merchandise or services.
- Disclose any confidential MRC information.
- Participate in political activities and discussions while performing MRC duties.
- Use disruptive behavior including behavior that is dangerous to myself and others; this includes acts of violence, physical or sexual abuse or harassment.
- Use profane language and/or engage in disruptive behavior including what could be considered physical or sexual abuse or harassment.

- Respond for duty under the influence of alcohol, prescription/non-prescription medication, or any other substances that may influence my ability to perform assigned tasks to the very best of my ability.
- Transport, store, and/or consume alcoholic beverages and/or illegal substances while performing duties or attending training.
- Wear MRC attire while under the influence of alcohol or illegal substances.
- Participate in illegal activity.

Confidentiality

Volunteers are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of all proprietary or privileged information to which they may be exposed to while serving as a volunteer. This includes information involving staff, volunteers, patients, or any other information deemed sensitive. All MRC Volunteers will receive training on, and must strictly adhere to, HIPAA policy regarding confidentiality.

Failure to maintain confidentiality may result in termination of the volunteer's relationship with the program or other corrective action. Prior to participating in volunteer activities, all MRC Volunteers will need to sign a Volunteer General Release and Confidentiality Agreement stating that he/she has read and understands the agreement. This form will be maintained with each volunteer's records. A copy is provided with the Hidalgo County MRC application.

Harassment, Discrimination, Substance Use, & Violence

The Hidalgo County MRC is committed to providing a work environment free from harassment and discrimination in which all individuals are treated with respect and dignity. Each individual has the right to work in a professional atmosphere that promotes equal opportunities and prohibits discriminatory practices, including harassment. It is the policy of the Hidalgo County MRC that harassment based on race, color, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, marital status, disability, veteran status or any other basis is strictly prohibited. Any harassment, whether verbal or physical, is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

If you feel that you may have been the subject of discrimination or harassment, you should contact the Unit Leader. Any reports of discrimination or harassment will be examined impartially and resolved promptly. The Public Health Emergency Preparedness team will determine the volunteer status of any volunteer found to be verbally or physically inappropriate during an activation, training, or meeting of the MRC.

The Hidalgo County MRC is dedicated to a safe, healthy, and drug-free work environment. All MRC volunteers are expected to report to duty free from drug and/or alcohol impairment and to remain in a condition that enables them to perform their job duties in a safe, efficient, legal, and professional manner. Volunteers must abide by the provisions of this policy as a condition of volunteer service. The Hidalgo County MRC is committed to our volunteer safety and health. The MRC does not tolerate acts or threats of violence committed by or against a volunteer and therefore prohibits workplace violence.

To ensure a safe working environment, please abstain from carrying a weapon on any property that prohibits weapons. If a volunteer is threatened while serving as an MRC volunteer, he/she should immediately report the event to the nearest person of authority (i.e., Team Leader, Supervisor, Safety Officer, Security/Police).

Dress Code

The Hidalgo County Human and Human Services Department will issue MRC identification badges to each volunteer. All volunteers must wear their badges and keep them visible during all training activations, community events, and exercises. Badges remain the property of Hidalgo County and must be returned or destroyed upon termination of volunteer membership.

Upon receiving a Hidalgo County volunteer badge, vetted volunteers may receive a vest, or other uniform and/or equipment during an activation, deployment, or community service with the MRC organization. Members are required to wear this safety gear as a part of their MRC uniform to clearly identify them as being a vetted volunteer. Upon separation from the Hidalgo County MRC, the former volunteer will be asked to return any safety gear and/or equipment back to the Unit Leader as appropriate.

In addition, all volunteers should maintain an appropriate dress code that includes clothes that are clean, neat, and without tears or rips. Clothes should be appropriate for the work environment and not contain offensive material, slogans, or graphics.

Liability and Workers Compensation

The Hidalgo County MRC intends to mitigate and prevent risks to volunteers. Every attempt will be made to reduce risk to volunteers through training, education, and the use of universal precautions. Be aware, however, that some unanticipated risk possibilities may be present, both during a public health emergency and during routine public health events. Hidalgo County does not carry Texas Workers' Compensation insurance for its volunteers. Volunteers are not provided with insurance that could otherwise be expected to compensate or reimburse them for injuries or medical-related expenses that may occur because of their services. This includes, but is not limited to, injuries that might occur in a workplace, field of deployment, or in motor vehicle accidents while performing volunteer services or duties.

However, volunteers are protected from legal liability under the **Volunteer Protection Act of 1997**. Under the Volunteer Protection Act of 1997, people who volunteer for non-profit organizations or government entities may not be held liable for any harm (except for a harm caused by the operation of a motor vehicle or a harm caused by criminal conduct or gross or reckless misconduct) that they cause while engaged in volunteer activity.

In addition, the **Federal Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness (PREP) Act** may protect the volunteer if a federal disaster declaration is made by the Secretary of Department of Health and Human Services due to a threat that poses a credible risk of a public health emergency.

Immunity from tort liability is granted to individuals providing aid within the scope of the declaration. There are exceptions to the PREP Act if the action by a volunteer causes a serious harm, death, or willful misconduct. Actions that are outside the scope of the PREP Act declaration are not covered.

Activation / Deployment

The MRC has guidelines for deployment to manage emergency response in an organized, efficient manner. The Hidalgo County MRC can be activated by the Hidalgo County Judge, the Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Director, or the Emergency Management Coordinator.

No unauthorized individual may deploy MRC members. Although the primary focus of Hidalgo County MRC members is to respond to events within Hidalgo County, members may also be deployed in regional, statewide, or national disasters. Volunteers should never self-deploy as a Hidalgo County MRC member in any situation.

Members will be notified of activation through the Everbridge notification system which may contact members via text message, phone, or email. The Everbridge notification number used for Hidalgo County MRC is **88911**. Volunteers are encouraged to save this phone number in their cell phones. The Texas Disaster Volunteer Registry (TDVR) may be used as a secondary notification system.

Fitness for Duty

A healthy and safe environment is important, and no job is so important or urgent that it cannot be done safely. As an MRC volunteer, you have a responsibility for your own safety and health. Fitness for duty involves being alert and aware of your current situation and watching out for any environmental hazards.

Volunteers should complete a self-assessment of their fitness for duty prior to deployment. Members will not be asked to fill any position for which they feel they do not meet the requirements.

- **Physical Fitness:** Prior to duty assignment, MRC members will be notified of the expected level of fitness for each job assignment. Members should only accept positions that they are physically able to fulfill.
- **Emotional Fitness:** MRC members participating in a response or deployment may witness disturbing or traumatic events, experience difficult situations, and/or work long hours in austere conditions. MRC members should be in a healthy emotional state prior to deployment.
- **Financial Fitness:** MRC members are not compensated for their time or travel expenses by Hidalgo County. The Hidalgo County MRC will not ask volunteers to disclose financial information but encourages volunteers to consider the effect that a deployment would have on their financial status.

Disciplinary Action

Hidalgo County MRC members, while performing duties or rendering services as an MRC representative, are expected to maintain high standards of conduct at all times. Disciplinary action may be initiated to correct inappropriate performance, work related behavior, or behavior which reflects adversely upon Hidalgo County, the MRC, or other MRC members.

The degree of disciplinary action shall relate to the gravity of improper conduct. A violation of any Hidalgo County Medical Reserve Corps policy or a change in the member's criminal history may result in disciplinary action. However, a member may receive disciplinary action for offenses other than those enumerated in these policies. All disciplinary decisions shall be made by the Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Department.

Termination of Membership

A member of the Hidalgo County MRC may be dismissed for any action that violates the Hidalgo County MRC policies or any other improper conduct or performance that constitutes cause for dismissal. Actions that can lead to termination include, but are not limited to:

- Self-deployment as an MRC volunteer without assignment or direction
- Conviction for any offense that would eliminate consideration of an applicant for membership,
- Willful destruction of Hidalgo County property
- And/or violation of Hidalgo County MRC Code of Conduct or Volunteer General Release & Confidentiality Agreement.

Discontinuation of Membership

Members may cease volunteering with Hidalgo County MRC at any time. We ask that a member who wishes to end participation in the MRC program, please inform the Unit Leader or designee in writing at mrc@hchd.org. Hidalgo County MRC badges and any issued equipment should be returned by mail or in person to Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Department, 1304 South 25th Avenue, Edinburg, Texas 78542.

Be Informed

One of the most important things to do is to be informed. Learn about the possible emergencies that could happen in your area. Learn about the emergency plans that exist within your local government (e.g., state, county) and other locations specific to you (i.e., schools, places of work).

Additionally, when an emergency occurs, your ability to access information is going to be very important, so make sure that you can stay informed. One way to do this is to have a battery-powered radio available in case the power goes out.

Staying Prepared

In an emergency, we understand that your family, friends, and neighbors are going to come first. We highly recommend that you take action to help ensure that you and those you care about are prepared for an emergency. Ensuring that you are well-prepared at home and at work to deal with an emergency situation will allow you to be ready to respond as a volunteer when you are needed. Emergency preparedness requires proper planning, organization, and practice, but the pay-off is invaluable.

The MRC may be trained to staff mass vaccination or dispensing clinics, staff alternate care facilities, provide public health surge capacity, assist in sheltering operations, and other emergency operations. When you are notified to report to a local incident site, you should be prepared to be on-site for at least 12 hours.

Therefore, you should remember to bring any personal necessities with you, such as water, snacks, phone chargers, and any medications you require.

For more information on deployment, visit NACCHO MRC Deployment Readiness Guide: <https://www.naccho.org/programs/public-health-preparedness/medical-reserve-corps>

Keep in mind, there are many other resources available that go into more detail about how to prepare for emergencies. The Unit Leader and other MRC volunteers may have recommendations for more preparedness resources.