

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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San Mateo County Health System

**San Mateo County Volunteer Emergency Response Teams Rise to the Challenge**  
*Over 14,000 Households Reached in a Simulation of Door-to-Door Distribution of Medicine*

**SAN MATEO, Calif.** – On March 11, 2009, from 9 a.m. to noon, Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) from 15 cities and San Mateo Coastside Medical Reserve Corps (SMC MRC) volunteers delivered earthquake preparedness brochures to simulate the medicine that could be delivered following a health-related emergency involving large segments of the population. Over 14,000 households throughout San Mateo County were reached in under three hours, well above the expected target of 10,000 households.

Command posts were established in several of the participating jurisdictions. From there two to three-person teams dressed in iridescent yellow vests trekked into their assigned neighborhoods packing stacks of door hangers. Approximately 200 CERT and SMC MRC volunteers practiced radio communications with their command posts as they made their rounds through the neighborhoods. The volunteers were given challenges throughout their mission that were intended to simulate the types of incidents that they might face during an actual health emergency. For example, one scenario simulated a member of the public who needed American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation to communicate with the volunteers. The command post worked up the chain of command requesting ASL support from the Health System and after some initial shuffling was able to identify a potential resource for ASL interpreters in the event of an actual emergency.

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The San Mateo County Health System organized similar exercises in 2006 and 2007 involving one and two jurisdictions. This year's drill was expanded to involve fifteen cities throughout San Mateo County.

“These exercises promote community involvement in emergency response. It is thrilling to see such a great turnout of volunteers and participating jurisdictions. Police, fire and health agencies learn from the experience and strengthen working relationships between agencies and citizens,” said Carl Hess, Health Emergency Coordinator for the San Mateo County Health System. “We all come away with good lessons and the confidence that real events will be responded to efficiently.”

The San Mateo County drill was funded by federal grants for pandemic flu preparedness and the Cities Readiness Initiative. The Health System plans to continue this as an annual exercise.

“I'm very impressed at what the San Mateo County communities were able to accomplish during this exercise. This provides strong evidence of the growing strength of emergency response volunteers to help in protecting their communities from natural and manmade disasters. I am grateful that our cities and county have put emphasis on this model of citizen preparedness. Efforts should continue in recruiting and training CERTs and Medical Reserve Corps teams,” said Dr. Scott Morrow, San Mateo County Health Officer.

In the event of a major health emergency such as Pandemic Influenza, a food or water-borne illness, or an intentional release of a biological agent, there is a possibility that medications and/or vaccines may be distributed on a mass scale. Local health departments are prepared to work with other local, state and federal officials to deliver medications from local supplies and the Strategic National Stockpile to those who may have been exposed to the disease. CERT, SMC MRC units and other volunteers will be essential to the success of the response in San Mateo County.

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**Additional Information**

**Strategic National Stockpile (SNS)** [www.bt.cdc.gov/stockpile/index.asp](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/stockpile/index.asp)

**Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT)**

Belmont-San Carlos Fire Department [www.bsccert.wordpress.com](http://www.bsccert.wordpress.com)

Central County Fire Department  
(Serving Burlingame and Hillsborough) [www.burlingame.org](http://www.burlingame.org)

Colma Fire Protection District [www.colmafire.com](http://www.colmafire.com)

Foster City Fire [www.fostercitycert.org](http://www.fostercitycert.org)

Half Moon Bay Fire Department [www.coastsidefire.org/cert](http://www.coastsidefire.org/cert)

Menlo Park Fire Protection District  
(Serving Atherton, East Palo Alto, and Menlo Park) [www.menlofire.org](http://www.menlofire.org)

Millbrae Fire Department [www.ci.millbrae.ca.us](http://www.ci.millbrae.ca.us)

North County Fire Authority  
(Serving Brisbane, Daly City, Pacifica) [www.northcountyfire.org](http://www.northcountyfire.org)

Redwood City Fire Department [www.redwoodcity.org/fire](http://www.redwoodcity.org/fire)

San Mateo Coastside Medical Reserve Corps [www.SMCMRC.org](http://www.SMCMRC.org)

San Mateo Fire Department [www.sanmateocert.org](http://www.sanmateocert.org)

South San Francisco Fire Department [www.ci.ssf.ca.us/depts/fire](http://www.ci.ssf.ca.us/depts/fire)

Woodside Fire Department [www.cerpp.org/cert](http://www.cerpp.org/cert)

**San Mateo County's Community Alert System, (SMC Alert)** [www.smcalert.info](http://www.smcalert.info)