

# Minnesota Responds Medical Reserve Corps Volunteer Protections

HF3654 / SF3135

---

## Description

Amend Minnesota Statutes Chapter 145A by adding language to provide liability and workers compensation coverage for a new type of health disaster volunteer. Corresponding changes are proposed to Workers Compensation Law, Chapter 176, and Interstate Compact statutes in Chapter 192.

**Minnesota Responds Medical Reserve Corps (MRC)** are medical and non-medical professionals skilled and trained in emergency or disaster response. They are recruited by local jurisdictions, healthcare facilities, the University of Minnesota professional associations, as well as other emergency response partners. The Commissioner of Health may mobilize MRC volunteers to provide disaster medical assistance.

When the Commissioner requests the MRC volunteers for events outside their home jurisdiction, this legislation provides the volunteers with liability and workers compensation protections as though they were state employees.

## Background

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) maintains the statewide internet-based volunteer registry system providing central coordination for health volunteers managed and deployed by local jurisdictions and other disaster response entities.

Local coordinators provide training, support, and oversight so that volunteers are prepared and ready to go. MDH uses nationally prescribed standards to verify credentials, assure current licensure, and manage skill-based information. This enables MDH to exchange information with other state programs when volunteers are asked to assist other states. It also allows Minnesota to receive

information about volunteers to be deployed to our state.

The Minnesota Responds MRC program has grown to over 7,000 healthcare workers and related volunteer participants from across the state.

Recent disasters have highlighted inconsistencies in volunteer protections leading to uncertainty among volunteers and local coordinators. Difficulties in recruiting and deploying non-government health volunteers have hindered our preparedness for emergencies within and outside Minnesota. This legislative proposal removes significant barriers to effective volunteer participation in response.

## Proposal

This proposal will provide *liability coverage* and defense for MRC volunteers in two ways:

1. Within the state, MRC volunteers deployed by the Commissioner will have the same liability protections as a state employee.
2. When deployed outside of Minnesota, MRC volunteers will be eligible for the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) liability protections. This 50 state compact makes volunteer liability the responsibility of the requesting state.

The proposal will also provide *workers compensation benefits*, including medical treatment when injured, for MRC volunteers whether deployed in Minnesota or to another state. Subject to the limits of the workers compensation law, the proposal includes the choice of income replacement benefits based upon current employment or upon the designated volunteer role.



Office of Emergency Preparedness  
625 Robert St. N.  
St. Paul, MN 55164  
(651) 201-5700  
[www.health.state.mn.us](http://www.health.state.mn.us)

# Minnesota Responds Medical Reserve Corps Volunteer Protections – page 2

---

Workers compensation insurance will be purchased by MDH to cover the MRC volunteers through the Risk Management Division of the Department of Administration.

## **Impact**

Eighty percent of healthcare providers in Minnesota work outside of government and are not a resource currently available for government mutual aid and are often not covered by their own insurance if deployed through the MRC program.

Prior to Hurricane Katrina in 2005, about 500 healthcare workers were registered in the Minnesota Responds MRC system. A surge of over 2,000 healthcare workers signed up in late 2005 and another surge signed up following the 2007 disasters in Minnesota so there are now over 7,000 volunteers in the program. People want to volunteer during a disaster, but recognize they need clear liability and workers compensation protections because of the inherent dangers in deployment during disasters. This legislative proposal eliminates the barriers to volunteer participation arising from inadequate liability and workers compensation coverage.

This proposal is recommended to be effective the day after enactment.