

National Animal Health Emergency Response Corps

By Brie German

During an emergency response, it's important to be prepared and have the right number of people with the right set of skills. For the Veterinary Services (VS) program, the National Animal Health Emergency Response Corps (NAHERC) is a crucial part of making that happen.

VS created the volunteer corps to make sure that—in addition to its own ranks—it has an external established network of trained veterinarians and technicians available to combat U.S. animal disease outbreaks. NAHERC consists of private and State animal health technicians and veterinarians willing to step in and support APHIS.

Depending on the situation, duties may include examining herds or flocks, vaccinating animals, collecting epidemiologic information, depopulating diseased animals, or inspecting livestock markets, trucks, and vehicles.

Proven Needs and Proven Benefits

During the United Kingdom's (UK) foot-and-mouth disease outbreak in 2002, the UK's Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food requested APHIS' help. VS provided veterinary medical officers to assist, but UK officials needed additional help to control the outbreak. In response, VS coordinated sending approximately 145 Corps members on 30-day rotations. Corps members provided valuable skills to help complement and support APHIS employees during the outbreak.

In October 2002, APHIS again drew upon the NAHERC for assistance. In response to an outbreak of exotic Newcastle disease (END), VS worked closely with State and local officials in California. Together, VS and its cooperators conducted aggressive END quarantine, control, and cleanup efforts to prevent the disease from spreading. NAHERC was there too, providing much needed help. Approximately 340 Corps members participated in the disease response.

Growing the Numbers

VS primarily recruits NAHERC personnel through veterinary conferences, fairs, and Web sites, as well as through colleges and universities. Veterinarian students serve as excellent technicians and can earn pay while gaining valuable on-the-job experience.

Thomas Cunningham, NAHERC coordinator, is working to recruit State SARTS/CARTS into the NAHERC program due to their command structure and prior training.

To aid with recruiting, NAHERC also began utilizing USAJobs in June 2007 and enrolled more than 500 qualified members in the first year. NAHERC now has over 1100 qualified staff and their members include animal health technicians, veterinarians, retirees, and students.

You can also help grow the Corps' numbers by sharing information about NAHERC with others outside of the agency and by telling them how to get involved.

Individuals can apply through www.usajobs.com. Qualified personnel become temporary VS employees and can serve as veterinary medical officers or as animal health technicians during an emergency situation. For more information, please visit <http://naherc.aphis.usda.gov> or send an email to: naherc@aphis.usda.gov