

## Wisconsin Hospital Association, Inc

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### Emergency Readiness Top Priority for Wisconsin Hospitals

**MADISON (May 19, 2011)**--- No community is immune from the destruction and devastation of a natural or manmade disaster. The Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA) wants to reassure residents that Wisconsin's hospitals are well-prepared for and ready to respond to both natural disasters and acts of terrorism.

Since the formation of the Wisconsin Hospitals Emergency Preparedness Program (WHEPP) in 2002 in response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11, a tremendous amount of disaster and emergency preparedness activity has occurred throughout the state.

A vital step in this process has been the establishment of expert panels to evaluate current hospital practices, create more efficient procedures and integrate them with other emergency response organizations.

"Members of these multi-disciplinary panels were recruited from across the state and are topic experts with boots-on-the-ground experience," says Mary Kay Grasmick, WHA's liaison to the WHEPP program. "Their collaboration has resulted in Wisconsin having an emergency preparedness response plan that has been developed by topic experts, and that ensures a consistent response across the state."

With the assistance of federal funding and using their own resources, hospitals across the state have invested in critical equipment, emergency preparedness planning and employee and volunteer training, including:

- Multiple communication systems;
- Command center protocols;
- Alternate treatment sites for victims;
- Storage and tracking of medical supplies and equipment;
- Managing large surges of patients; and,
- Effective, longer-term emergency operations.

Additionally, Wisconsin created partnerships with Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, the City of Chicago, Michigan, Indiana and Ohio to develop interstate emergency response plans for regional disasters such as fires, earthquakes, pandemics, radiation contamination and terrorism.

WHEPP has strengthened emergency preparedness throughout the state. Health care facilities now communicate effectively with intrastate partners, can manage a surge of patients and maintain operations for extended periods in the event of a large-scale disaster.

Emergency preparedness is, however, a moving target.

“Wisconsin’s health care professionals now have the knowledge and training to respond in the best possible way when their communities need them most,” according to Grasmick. “But they are constantly incorporating new techniques for patient triage, treatment and transport into their response plans to ensure that when disaster strikes, they are ready.”

All hospitals, large and small, have improved their capabilities to manage locally with their own resources, until resources from other hospitals and emergency responders become available.

“Hospitals have always been central to a community’s ability to respond to an emergency,” says WHA President Steve Brenton. “Communities look to hospitals to take care of the sick or injured and coordinate relief and recovery efforts. Thanks to WHEPP, Wisconsin hospitals have invested heavily in planning and have tested these plans in exercises to be better prepared to respond to large-scale emergencies to save lives, ease suffering, and mitigate loss.”

To learn more about Wisconsin hospital preparedness, see the 2011 WHEPP Annual Report at <http://www.wha.org/disasterpreparedness/pdf/wheppreport2011.pdf> or visit: [www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/preparedness/hospital](http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/preparedness/hospital)

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*This week, nearly 100 hospitals in Wisconsin are participating in a statewide emergency preparedness drill with the Wisconsin National Guard called “Vigilant Guard.” The Vigilant Guard exercise continues for the remainder of the week with scenarios ranging from tornados and earthquakes to chemical spills and cyber attacks. Nearly 3,000 participants - representing up to 48 federal, state, county, volunteer and private agencies - will respond to complex mock emergencies in several communities across the state during the exercise. Check with your local hospital for more information.*