

New River Health District Named “Public Health Ready”
-- Achieves National Recognition for Local Emergency Planning --

As local health departments nationwide strive to protect the public from new and infectious diseases, bioterrorism, natural disasters, and other public health threats, the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) has recognized the Virginia Department of Health’s (VDH) New River Health District (NRHD) for achieving Project Public Health Ready (PPHR) recognition status. The NRHD is one of seven health districts in Virginia that have been recognized for the ability to respond to public health emergencies.

“We’re pleased to achieve this national recognition for our emergency preparedness efforts in the New River Valley,” said Dr. Jody Hershey, Director of the NRHD. “This honor reflects tremendous dedication, creativity, and cooperation on the part of our entire team and our local partners -- schools, universities, hospitals, health care professionals, health and human service agencies, local government, business, community volunteers, faith community, and other public health stakeholders -- are to be commended for their efforts and their collaboration on behalf of our citizens. Through PPHR, the New River Health District is fully integrated into the response community and prepared to respond to any emergency.”

PPHR is a competency-based training and recognition program for local emergency preparedness developed through a unique partnership between NACCHO and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. To achieve PPHR status, local health departments must meet expectations in public health preparedness in three key areas: preparedness planning, workforce competency, and demonstration of all-hazards readiness through exercises or a response to a real event. PPHR recognition confirms that the local health district has an emergency response plan in place, the plan is integrated with other jurisdictional emergency response plans, agency staff members are trained, and the plan is exercised and used during public health emergencies.

PPHR’s mission is to protect the public’s health and increase the public health infrastructure by building local preparedness capacity and capability with assistance from state health departments. PPHR criteria are the national standards for public health preparedness, and incorporate the most recent federal initiatives. According to NACCHO, since 2004, 156 local health departments--out of more than 3,000 nationwide--have been recognized as meeting all the PPHR requirements.

“The New River Valley community is a leader in emergency preparedness -- in public health, in public safety, and in other disciplines. Still, the most important factor in determining whether we succeed in responding to an emergency will be the actions of our citizens in advance planning, cooperating with authorities and helping each other in a time of duress,” Dr. Hershey said.

For more information visit www.vdh.virginia.gov or www.naccho.org, or call NACCHO at 202-783-5550.