



## **Response Support Corps National Guidance September 11, 2008**

### **BACKGROUND**

In September 2003, the Administrator established the Response Support Corps (RSC) as part of the implementation of the agency-wide National Approach to Response (NAR). The response to the World Trade Center and Pentagon terrorist attacks, anthrax incidents, and the Columbia Space Shuttle accident made it evident that significant additional resources are needed to augment EPA's primary emergency response staff, the On-Scene Coordinators, in order for EPA's emergency response program to be successful. In 2005, over 1600 EPA employees were deployed to the Gulf Coast to assist in the response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and many more provided support from the regional and headquarters Emergency Operations Centers. This further demonstrated that an effective agency response is dependent on the skills and expertise of personnel throughout the Agency.

EPA must prepare for the very real possibility of multiple simultaneous nationally significant incidents, including chemical, biological, or radiological emergencies and natural disasters. The successful response to incidents of this magnitude and complexity requires the participation of all EPA offices.

The RSC is the mechanism through which all EPA offices prepare to effectively fulfill their roles and maximize EPA's response capabilities within our current resource base. The RSC is a nationally led initiative that is managed by both headquarters and regional offices, as appropriate, with membership open to all EPA employees. RSC members may be required to support operations in the field as well as at the headquarters Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and the Regional Emergency Operations Centers (REOCs). Support can include general administrative duties as well as specialized program skills such as air and water monitoring, radiation, contracts, finance, laboratory, and public affairs.

### **PURPOSE OF THE NATIONAL GUIDANCE**

This guidance sets forth member responsibilities, training and exercise requirements, activation and deployment procedures, compensation information, and associated programmatic and management responsibilities for the RSC. Each Regional Incident Coordination Team (RICT) and the National Incident Coordination Team (NICT) may also develop additional specific standard operating procedures, as appropriate.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Regional Offices and AAships**

In the regions, the RICTs will provide oversight for the regional RSC, and at headquarters (HQ), the NICT will provide oversight for the HQ RSC. The NICT and RICTs are responsible for the recruitment, training, and assistance in the deployment of the RSC members. The Office of Emergency Management (OEM), in the Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response (OSWER), will name a National RSC Coordinator to work with the regions and ensure overall program coordination. In each region and Assistant Administrator's office (AAship), an RSC Coordinator will also be designated to assist in program operations and to work with the National RSC Coordinator.

The National RSC Coordinator will organize an RSC Coordinators meeting annually or more often if necessary. Based on input from regional and headquarters coordinators, baseline training materials as well as recruitment and outreach tools and materials will be developed. In some cases, training may be provided.

RSC participation in training and exercises will be coordinated through the NICT/RICTs and RSC Coordinators. During an incident response, personnel requirements, including required skills, will be communicated to the NICT/RICTs by the EOC and REOCs. Positions will be filled based on RSC members' skills and availability.

The NICT, RICTs, National RSC Coordinator, and RSC Coordinators will work together to ensure that members will have access to necessary tools for deployment and that adequate training opportunities and relevant exercises are made available to RSC members.

RSC Coordinators will utilize the [QuickPlace website](#) for information. Outreach tools developed by each region or headquarters will be posted to the QuickPlace website and can be utilized as best practices for other regions or headquarters.

Each region/AAship may develop a website designed to provide information to their RSC members, including training opportunities, guidance documents, and other tools.

### **RSC Members**

Employees are asked to identify themselves as willing to participate. Interested employees register via an online RSC database. Supervisors are notified of this registration and will have the opportunity to discuss workload and priorities at the time of training, exercise, or deployment. During a national emergency situation, EPA has broad authority to reassign staff with skills required to carry out our mission. However, EPA staff who would normally be called upon to support a large response (due to specialized skills and their day-to-day duties) should also join the RSC to become familiar with agency response procedures. Participation as an RSC member will require time away from one's regular job for training and exercises, as well as potential activation during response activities. Employees, in consultation with their supervisors, must determine if they have the time to commit to the RSC. Generally, RSC

members can anticipate that participation in training and exercises will take less than 24 hours annually. The following responsibilities apply:

- Enter personal information in RSC database and work with RSC Coordinators to update information as necessary (e.g., training and exercises);
- Participate in initial and follow-up required RSC training;
- Participate in at least one exercise annually; and,
- Respond to an incident when members of the RSC are deployed.

Some specialized positions require additional training. RSC members who take Incident Command System (ICS) position-specific training are committing to serve in the position(s) for which they are trained. This will be documented and agreed upon by both the RSC member and his/her supervisor.

### **RESPONSE SUPPORT CORE STRUCTURE**

For the purposes of training and selection for activation, there are different levels of participation in the RSC. Some members, because of their specialized expertise and training will be needed to fill specific positions during a response while others possess skills that can be applied to a variety of positions. A three group structure will be used to address these differences.

**Group 1** includes RSC members who will be available to fill a variety of general positions during a response. They will receive the required basic training for membership and will also be required to participate in one exercise annually. When there is a need to deploy these members, their availability will be a joint decision by the RSC member and his/her supervisor, taking into account workload and personal circumstances. These RSC members will use their existing skills for a response or will receive on-the-job training as needed.

**Group 2** includes *mission essential* personnel (technical specialists) with expertise in specific technical areas pertinent to the essential requirements of the particular mission. Although these personnel may be designated by specific program or regional offices, it is important that they register as members of the RSC so that they may obtain relevant training, participate in exercises, and be tracked as part of the regional/national cadre of trained responders. This will also provide for better integration into the ICS structure during response. These RSC members will use their existing technical skills to support the response. Some mission essential personnel may require additional training in order to fulfill the mission's needs. When not needed during a response to fill their specific mission-essential roles, they may be asked to fill general positions.

**Group 3** includes members who have been trained for *Key Leadership Positions* (KLPs) as leaders and managers on the Incident Management Team (IMT). An IMT is the field team charged with implementing the response effort and consists of personnel appropriately trained and qualified for ICS Command Staff and General Staff positions. Within the IMT, specific positions are charged with leading and managing the field response. EPA has identified 11 KLP

positions within the IMT: Incident Commander (IC), Public Information Officer, Liaison Officer, Safety Officer, Finance, Logistics, Planning and Operations Section Chiefs, and Situation, Resources and Environmental Unit Leaders. Staff in these positions would be among the first to deploy for a major incident.

- Employee volunteers who have appropriate expertise and/or skills as a result of their current jobs will frequently be trained for these IMT positions. For example, an employee who works in a budget or finance organization may be selected for training as a Finance Section Chief;
- Specific training is required for these positions, including intermediate and advanced ICS training and KLP position-specific training. Other training related to job-specific requirements (e.g., EOC orientation, Web EOC, etc.) may be needed;
- Once an RSC member is trained for a KLP, he/she is considered to be available as a critical asset during an incident. Reasonable scheduling accommodation will be made for deployments. A KLP trained member who isn't available during a specific deployment period should make arrangements to become available later during the response effort; and,
- KLP-trained members may also fill positions including RSC general membership assignments that may arise during the response.

### **ACTIVATION OF THE RSC**

When a region or headquarters identifies the need for assistance outside of the Emergency Response staff, that need will be communicated through the NICT or RICT.

If the support required is beyond the capacity of the region, the next step would be to request assistance from their assigned backup region(s) as defined in existing backup region Memoranda of Assistance (MOAs).

During responses that exhaust the resources of the region and their backup regions, additional resource requests will be made through the headquarters EOC. These requests will be coordinated through the EOC and REOCs on behalf of the NICT and RICTs.

### **ACTIVATION, DEPLOYMENT AND UTILIZATION**

The NICT and each RICT will develop procedures for activation, deployment and utilization of the RSC in HQ and in each region respectively. These specific procedures should, at a minimum, address the requirements and expectations listed below.

- The RSC may be activated during significant incidents, which may include wide-scale natural disasters (such as earthquakes and hurricanes), terrorist attacks, National Security Special Events, exercises, large scale spills or releases from other causes.

- RSC members should be provided incident specific information as part of their pre-deployment package. Additionally, when appropriate, RSC members will be provided with personal protective equipment and/or EPA identification clothing.
- When deployed, an RSC member is expected to report quickly to the designated function and individual in charge at the assigned work location and he/she is expected to stay through the duration of the assignment.
- Once duties are assigned, consistent with ICS principles, RSC members are under the command and supervision of the individual in charge of that location or area of responsibility.
- During activation, RSC members should expect to work long hours under potentially stressful conditions.
- The duration of the deployment will depend on the nature of the event and the response needed. The expected duration of the deployment will be in two-week increments with additional days on either end of the deployment period to allow for transition of personnel. For responses of longer duration, the tour of duty may increase to facilitate logistical issues associated with transitioning personnel.
- If the IC at the work location judges the RSC member's performance to be ineffective for the tasks assigned, the IC may release the RSC member from his/her duties and the RSC member will return to his/her regular job. Reports of unacceptable performance or conduct should be provided to the appropriate EOC or REOC.
- In many cases, it may be necessary to temporarily convert the employee's regular work schedule from either a compressed or flexible work schedule to a regular/standard work schedule for the course of the RSC assignment/deployment.
- In rare situations, an employee may be detailed to a response for an extended period. In cases where a detail lasts longer than 90 days, a Performance, Appraisal and Recognition System (PARS) agreement should be established. For situations greater than two weeks but less than 90 days, the employee may request a short, written evaluation be provided to his or her supervisor of record (first line supervisor) by the Incident Commander/Coordinator or their designee.

## **HEALTH AND SAFETY REQUIREMENTS**

For RSC assignments into the field, the deploying region or headquarters must ensure that EPA and OSHA requirements are met prior to the deployment of their respective personnel. The IC will clearly articulate health and safety and any other special requirements when requesting employees for staffing the IMT. These requirements are incident-specific and may include the need for specific inoculations, training, the use of personal protective equipment (e.g., respirators), and pre-deployment medical screening clearance. The screening protocols for RSC members initiated during the Hurricane Katrina/Rita response are being formalized in forthcoming guidance from the Safety, Health and Environmental Management Division (SHEMD) in the Office of Administration and Resource Management (OARM).

## **TRAINING AND EXERCISES**

Each RICT and the NICT will develop specific training and exercise requirements, as appropriate, taking into consideration the general requirements outlined below.

### **Training**

To be considered trained and deployment-ready, RSC members must complete the on-line ICS 100 and 200 courses and attend an initial orientation that addresses the following topics: the National Contingency Plan (NCP), the National Response Framework (NRF), National Incident Management System (NIMS), ICS, EPA's National Approach to Response, and Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM). RSC members should also complete the 700 and 800 courses offered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). These on-line courses are available through FEMA's website at <http://www.fema.gov/>.

Each RSC member or the Regionally appointed designee is required to enter his/her training into the National RSC Database as courses are completed. The RSC Coordinators will assist in this effort and ensure that the database is kept current.

In addition to the general training listed above, RSC members may need to attend specific training related to their job duties. For example, personnel who may be required to work within an Operations Section directing other EPA personnel and contractors may need to attend a Field Division/Group Supervisor class. In addition, training on job-specific requirements (e.g., EOC orientation, response tracking database, safety equipment, etc.) may be required. All required training will be acquired during an employee's regularly scheduled work hours.

RSC members are expected to maintain expertise within their programmatic area (e.g., contract specialists will maintain their required certifications as part of their routine job function). RSC members will not be trained to perform technical job functions that are outside the parameters of their current position within the Agency. For example, a community involvement coordinator will not be trained to take water samples in a response. However, mission essential technical personnel may require additional training in order to fulfill the mission's needs.

### **Exercises**

RSC members will be required to participate in at least one exercise annually. Exercises provide valuable training for RSC members in working with personnel from local, state and federal response communities and promote experience and the development of skills in particular positions. Exercise credit can be achieved by participation in a range of activities, including drills which familiarize RSC members with administrative aspects of the Emergency Operations Centers. The standard table-top exercises, regional field exercises, and National Level Exercises such as the TOPOFF exercise series, can be utilized, and this requirement can be met through participation in actual response events.

Participation in exercises will be tracked in the national RSC database and each RSC member or the Regional designee is responsible for entering his/her exercise information. As with training, the RSC Coordinators will assist as needed.

## **COMPENSATION**

RSC members mobilized and deployed for a given incident will receive all pay and allowances, including travel reimbursement, to which they shall be entitled under law and regulation.

Overtime compensation is authorized by two separate laws: Title 5, United States Code (USC), which applies to all employees, and the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), which applies to all employees unless designated as exempt under the FLSA. Implementation of these laws is addressed in EPA's Pay Administration Manual:

[http://intranet.epa.gov/ohr/humancapital/guides/hr\\_guide/tab7\\_pay\\_admin.pdf](http://intranet.epa.gov/ohr/humancapital/guides/hr_guide/tab7_pay_admin.pdf)

## **PROGRAM EVALUATION**

### **National Evaluation**

National consistency and evaluation of this program is ensured through the Core Emergency Response (Core ER) evaluation process. RSC is part of this annual evaluation process that measures the Agency's progress in preparedness for major responses. The Core ER evaluation criteria are updated annually.

### **Incident Specific Evaluation**

Following each activation of the RSC, the NICT/RICT chair, or designee(s) will hold an "After-action Debriefing" of RSC members and response personnel. This after-action debrief will identify specific areas that either worked well or need improvement regarding this guidance and/or national or regional SOPs for the RSC. Follow-up to these items will be the responsibility of the NICT and/ RICTs and tracked by the Coordinators.

## **FUNDING AND RESOURCES**

The home program office will cover the basic salary and benefits for RSC members while they are attending RSC training and during activation. Travel costs associated with training will also generally be the responsibility of the home program office. Because resources are tied to annual budgets, additional funding priorities will be determined on an annual basis. Regions and HQ

may develop their own funding plans to cover or share costs associated with the training and exercises attended by RSC members.

During activation, travel costs and overtime may be covered by mission assignments from FEMA or other federal agencies. Also, during activation salary costs for employees paid from trust funds may be covered by mission assignments.

## **INFORMATION MANAGEMENT**

A national RSC database will be utilized to provide a consistent information source for all RSC members. Members or the Regionally appointed designee will enter their relevant data into the database and update it regularly based on participation in training and exercises. Each region and headquarters will have access to their own regional/headquarters data to identify and activate members of the RSC. The database will be used to complete nationwide assessments of the RSC program. The RSC database will be maintained nationally and changes to the database structure as well as training for RSC Coordinators will be handled at the national level.