



**FEMA**

# Backgrounder

## **NATIONAL DISASTER MEDICAL SYSTEM AND DISASTER MEDICAL ASSISTANCE TEAMS**

The National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) is a cooperative asset-sharing program that augments local medical care when an emergency exceeds the scope of a community's hospital and healthcare resources. The emergency resources – which include some 8,000 medical and support personnel from across the country – come from federal, state and local governments, the private sector and civilian volunteers.

As part of NDMS, FEMA's Disaster Medical Assistance Teams deploy to disaster sites to provide medical care at a fixed or temporary medical care site, with sufficient supplies and equipment to sustain themselves for a period of 72 hours. In mass casualty incidents, their responsibilities may include triaging patients, providing high-quality medical care despite the adverse and austere environment often found at a disaster site, and preparing patients for evacuation.

In some situations, DMATs may provide primary medical care and/or may serve to augment overloaded local health care staffs. Under the rare circumstance that disaster victims are evacuated to a different locale to receive definitive medical care, DMATs may be activated to support patient reception and disposition of patients to hospitals.

NDMS –previously part of the Department of Health and Human Services– became part of Homeland Security when the new department was created in 2003. The Federal Emergency Management Agency, now part of the Department of Homeland Security, coordinates all components of NDMS. The Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense also participate in NDMS. Assets include:

- 55 Disaster Medical Assistance Teams (DMATs), which include specialized teams to handle burns, pediatrics, crush injuries, surgery and mental health;
- 11 Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Teams (DMORTs) –including one team with WMD capabilities– which consist of private citizens with specialized training and experience to help in the recovery, identification and processing of deceased victims;
- 4 National Medical Response Teams (NMRTs), to deal with the medical consequences of incidents potentially involving chemical, biological or nuclear materials;
- 3 Veterinary Medical Assistance Teams (VMATs), which include clinician veterinarians, pathologists, animal health technicians, microbiologists and others who assist animal disaster victims and provide care to search dogs; and
- 3 International Medical Surgical Teams (IMSuRTs) –one operational and two under development–highly specialized, trained and equipped to establish a fully capable free-standing field surgical facility anywhere in the world.

National Disaster Medical Assistance Teams have recently responded to large-scale disasters including The World Trade Center in September 2001, Hurricane Isabel in September 2003, and the Bam, Iran Earthquake in December 2003. NDMS Teams have also been deployed in 2004 to support the G8 Summit in Georgia, and the National Democratic Convention in Boston. NDMS Teams will also support the Republican National Convention in New York in August.