

# Erie-based Disaster Medical Assistance Team Achieves Next Level

*Unit Sponsored by Saint Vincent Health System is Region's First*

**July 10, 2003**



Saint Vincent Health System announced today that the Erie-based federal Disaster Medical Assistance Team (DMAT) has achieved Level-2 or Developing Team Status in the National Disaster Medical System.

The mobile medical support team has been sponsored by Saint Vincent since its inception in Sept. 2002. It is the region's first DMAT and just the second in the state of Pennsylvania. Level-2 designation means the medical and non-medical personnel that make up the Erie team can now be deployed to assist other teams at disaster scenes. The DMAT will also begin receiving federal funding and supplies.

“It is the diligence and commitment made by the many community members who wanted to join the National Disaster Medical System which have helped us to quickly achieve a Level-2/Developing DMAT Team status,” said Russell Bieniek, MD, medical director of the Saint Vincent Emergency Department and DMAT PA-3 unit commander. “In just 10 short months, more than 100 community members have enrolled to become members of our Pennsylvania DMAT team and nearly 80 of them have completed all federal requirements. This is an outstanding response so far.”

Following the Sept. 2002 announcement, members of the Erie community quickly signed on to become a part of the Saint Vincent-sponsored DMAT initiative. An important part of the region's support has come from corporations, particularly Erie Insurance Group. Their donation of a “western shelter” -- a 20-foot octagonal tent with environmental controls, heat, insulation and electricity -- will provide shelter for disaster victims and the Erie DMAT team alike in future deployments.

DMAT volunteers are credentialed, trained, equipped and ready for rapid deployment -- within 12-24 hours -- to areas of federal disaster where local resources are overwhelmed. Most deployments are to scenes of natural disasters like earthquakes, hurricanes, floods and tornadoes. DMATs have also been deployed for acts of terror and as precautionary measures at major events, including the Presidential Inauguration and the Olympics.

The PA-3 DMAT team's next goal is to achieve Level-1 or Deployable Status, which is required to become fully deployable in a disaster situation.

A Level 1 team deployed for a field response assignment includes 35 personnel. There are nine non-healthcare positions (two DMAT Leaders, a safety officer, an administrative/finance chief, an administrative assistant, a logistics chief, an equipment specialist and two communications officers) and 21 healthcare positions (three medical officers, a pharmacist, a pharmacy assistant, two supervisory nurse specialists, six staff nurses, four nurse practitioners or physician assistants and four paramedics). Five additional team members are determined by DMAT. The final team member is a home base support person who is not deployed.

Although DMAT members are considered volunteers during the original credentialing and training process, when deployed they become employees of the U.S. Public Health Service and receive compensation from the federal government. All transportation, food, clothing, and lodging are provided during the deployment.