

Rapid Response Teams (RRT) Testimonials

Reflections on 10 years of RRTs (2008 – 2018)



“Developing and evolving the Washington RRT over the last 10 years has provided us numerous opportunities to get our public health partners around the same table to learn about each other’s capabilities and limitations when it comes to emergency response. The true return on investment, from my perspective, is the development of lasting relationships and trust between these agencies, which in turn increases our ability to effectively respond to human and animal food safety incidents.”

– Randy Treadwell, MPH
Program Manager, Rapid Response and Emergency Management
Washington State Department of Agriculture

Read about the Washington RRT’s response to the death of 15,000 commercially farmed mink due to contaminated feed (summer, 2016) in this Washington State Department of Agriculture blog post: [Response to animal feed contamination quick, coordinated.](#)

“Our internal and external coordination on prevention, preparedness, and response to food and feed issues has been fundamentally improved thanks to FDA’s long-term investment in the RRT Program.”

– Bradley Deacon, JD
Director, Office of Legal Affairs
Emergency Management Coordinator
Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development



Read about the Michigan RRT’s response to an intentional contamination event in April 2016 where Kyle Bessemer sprayed rodent poison on open salad and food bars at several grocery stores in the Ann Arbor, Michigan, area in this Food Safety Magazine e-newsletter article: [Case Update: Produce Targeted by Man Spraying Mouse Poison.](#)

Read about how the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development detected Salmonella enterica serotype Infantis in an unopened bag of dry dog food collected during routine retail surveillance response that was ultimately linked to a multi-state outbreak and resulted in the recall of sixteen brands involving > 30,000 tons of dry dog and cat food (Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association): [Outbreak of Salmonella enterica serotype Infantis infection in humans linked to dry dog food in the United States and Canada, 2012.](#)

“As a result of RRT development in Pennsylvania, we have strengthened relationships with public health and regulatory agencies; we know who the crucial individuals are and how to bring them in sooner, effectively and more proficiently to resolve a matter collectively. For example, within the past year, the RRT was brought in to assist a local health

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department in a joint investigation. This is just one of a number of instances that allowed the Pennsylvania RRT to be activated effectively, utilizing established procedures, resulting in swift resolution of the incident.”

– Lydia Johnson, MEd, DM
Director, Bureau of Food Safety and Laboratory Services
Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture

Read about the Pennsylvania RRT’s response to an incident involving contamination of apple juice with lye in this Food Safety Magazine article: [Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture’s Rapid Response Team: A Collaborative Response to Food Safety Emergencies.](#)



“The Virginia Rapid Response Team (VA RRT) has been instrumental in establishing a collaboration among RRT members, which include: the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) Food, Feed and Dairy regulatory programs; the Division of Consolidated Laboratory Services (DCLS); the Virginia Department of Health’s (VDH) Office of Epidemiology/Division of Surveillance and Investigation, Division of Environmental Health, and Office of Shellfish Sanitation; the FDA Office of Regulatory Affairs Human and Animal Foods East – Division 2/Baltimore District Office; and the United States Department of Agriculture/Food Safety Inspection Service regional office.

This relationship has improved foodborne illness outbreak investigations in Virginia, allowing for faster responses. The development of the VA RRT Response Manual and other reference materials, as well as training opportunities provided through RRT funding, have resulted in more efficient and effective multi-agency response.

Working as a coordinated team, we have successfully identified factors that contributed to outbreaks and implemented procedures to reduce future risk.

The VA RRT holds weekly calls with all agency partners, which are a vital component of the success of the RRT. The strong commitment of VA RRT members is demonstrated by robust engagement and participation in meetings, trainings, and other activities at the local, regional, and national level. The VA RRT also is committed to sharing our experiences with others to improve food safety. VA RRT members share success stories and lessons learned from our team’s activation and response activities with food safety professionals, industry, and consumers without hesitation.”

– Christy Brennan, MS
Virginia Rapid Response Team Coordinator
Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Read about the Virginia RRT’s response to *Listeria monocytogenes* in sprouts, resulting in a consent decree of permanent injunction in this FDA Press Release: [FDA and DOJ take action against Virginia soybean business for selling contaminated sprouts.](#)

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“The Maryland Rapid Response Team has literally transformed the way in which our food protection, epidemiology, agriculture, and laboratory staff work together. Not only has this improved our response to outbreaks, but also just as important, it has also led to more efforts focused on prevention. This has meant a safer food supply for the people of Maryland.”

– Clifford Mitchell, MD, MPH
Director, Environmental Health Bureau
Maryland Department of Health

“The [Multistate Outbreak of Listeriosis Linked to Roos Foods Dairy Products](#) (2014) began just as we were getting our RRT together in Maryland. Several individuals involved in *Listeria* cases ate a variety of soft cheeses from the same store, and all our initial food samples were negative. If it had not been for our new relationship with the Virginia RRT, the investigation would have gone nowhere. Once we told them about our investigation, they collected cheese samples that were positive for the same *Listeria* strain. Mystery solved! The greatest benefit of joining the RRT Program has been the relationships and collaboration with other states and the federal agencies to conduct rapid investigations and solve foodborne illness outbreaks that most likely could not be solved if we investigated it alone.”

– Hannah Lee, MPH
Outbreak Epidemiologist, Rapid Response Core Team
Maryland Department of Health

Read more about the Maryland and Virginia RRTs’ response to this outbreak in this APHL Blog Post: [Stopping Listeria required an arsenal of tools and an army of experts.](#)



“One of the successes of the Missouri RRT (MRRT) is strengthening the ties between the programs within the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services and the Missouri Department of Agriculture, which covers animal feed, pet food, produce, eggs, as well as pesticide and herbicide investigations. That partnership was recently put into action when we responded to a massive herbicide drift that impacted ready-to-eat produce over a huge, four-county area.

The MRRT has also strengthened the partnership with Missouri’s 114 autonomous Local Public Health Agencies (LPHA).

The team has worked closely with LPHA representatives to ensure that LPHAs are included as partners in the MRRT’s written plans and communications. MRRT outreach with LPHAs included attendance at regional meetings to talk to LPHA personnel and administrators, conducting an exercise in Kansas City, collaboration with LPHAs during nuclear exercises, providing Epi-Ready and aseptic sampling trainings for LPHA staff, and promoting information sharing agreements (i.e., [20.88s](#)).

The MRRT is working hard to deliver on the vision for RRTs conducting all hazards food and feed response. In addition to responding to microbiological and chemical contaminants in food, the MRRT serves as a key resource in the state’s radiological emergency response plan and has participated in two tabletop exercises for response to radiological contamination of a food product in Missouri.

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In addition to our efforts to strengthen preparedness and response within the state of Missouri, we have also benefited from being part of the national RRT Program and learning with and from other RRTs. We recently held our 2nd Annual Midwest RRTs Meeting, which included a multi-state tabletop exercise and After-Action Review. The strong partnership among RRTs also pays dividends during real-life events; such as our collaboration with Minnesota, California, and other states during the 2015 multi-state outbreak of *Listeria monocytogenes* linked to caramel apples to identify a common apple source among multiple implicated caramel apple manufacturers.”

– Mark Buxton, MA
Missouri Rapid Response Team Coordinator
Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services

Read more about the Missouri RRT, Minnesota RRT, and CalFERT response to the [Multistate Outbreak of Listeriosis Linked to Commercially Produced, Prepackaged Caramel Apples Made from Bidart Bros. Apples](#) in this Food Safety Magazine article: [Where the Rubber Meets the Road: RRTs in Action](#).
