**Objectives**

- Assess Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) employees perception of personal preparedness for emergencies.
- Familiarize employees with public health emergency operations.
- Increase knowledge on personal preparedness and the role DHMH employees play during an emergency.
- Identify gaps in emergency preparedness training among employees.

**Background**

With the focus on providing resources to partner agencies and the public, engaging health department employees in emergency preparedness can be challenging. Lack of preparedness increases vulnerability of employees and decreases the resiliency of the health department to emergencies. The DHMH Office of Preparedness and Response (OPR) chose to celebrate National Preparedness Month by engaging the department’s employees.

**Methods**

Over a four week period, OPR conducted a Preparedness Challenge for employees. Weekly challenge emails asked employees to show their preparedness by completing activities ranging from social media use to identifying emergency kit items. Participants were entered in a raffle for an emergency supply kit.

On September 30, 2015, OPR hosted a DHMH-wide event where employees were engaged through: “Pledge to Prepare” poster signing, photo booth and informational display tables. To familiarize employees with public health emergency operations, a functional Point of Dispensing (POD) exercise was held. Employees completed a “screening form” which captured their level of personal preparedness and training needs. POD participants were “dispensed” either a backpack or water bottle.

**Results**

- 257 Preparedness Challenge activities that highlighted the actions they took to prepare.
- 593 state employees went through the POD and completed the screening form. 426 (72%) were DHMH employees.

**Conclusion**

The National Preparedness Month initiative demonstrated the willingness of health department employees to engage in preparedness activities if they are offered. This presented an opportunity to design better preparedness activities to engage employees further and to improve personal preparedness and therefore resiliency among the staff.

**Future Initiatives**

- Developing curriculum to train DHMH in employees in Emergency Preparedness
- Providing CPR/AED training to employees
- Regularly sharing email updates on emergency preparedness topics