Although veterinary practice can be rewarding, many veterinary professionals seek to expand their skills and experience by challenging themselves in different areas of practice. Volunteering to help animals during disasters in particular provides a chance to break out of the day-to-day routine and really make a lasting, critical impact in the lives of both people and animals in our communities.

The CVMA actively supports the profession’s desire to help animals in crisis. In 1994, the CVMA created the Disaster Preparedness Committee, which works to maintain an efficient and effective disaster response network. In 2009, the CVMA registered the California Veterinary Medical Reserve Corps (CAVMRC). The CAVMRC mission is to provide veterinary services to animals affected by disasters in California.

So, where do you fit in? Veterinary professionals play a vital role in disaster response because we possess service skills that cannot be provided by any other emergency responders. By joining the CAVMRC, veterinary professionals have a way to collaborate with others who share common interests, train for disaster response, and volunteer to help animals during a crisis. The CAVMRC is comprised of volunteer veterinarians, registered veterinary technicians, veterinary assistants and office staff, and veterinary students. In the event of a disaster, members are contacted by the CAVMRC and asked if they are available to deploy.

Experiencing deployment and getting to practice during a disaster can provide lasting memories that serve as career highlights for many. In addition, the unique and specialized experience that one will gain while volunteering during disasters cannot be recreated in a classroom. The volunteer service that veterinary professionals provide during a crisis can build lasting community relationships and provide a lasting sense of accomplishment.

The CAVMRC is currently in an exciting developmental stage! One of only a handful of veterinary-focused MRCs in the country, the CAVMRC is expanding the role of veterinary responders during disasters. Objectives of the CAVMRC in 2012 include volunteer recruitment and member training.

To join the CAVMRC, please visit: www.cavmrc.net and download the Quick Registration form under the “Volunteer for the CAVMRC” link at the bottom of the home page. Once you have filled out and submitted your form, CVMA staff will create a profile for you in the State of California Disaster Healthcare Volunteers website (https://www.healthcarevolunteers.ca.gov/). You will then be sent a welcome email with your username and password, which you may then use to login to the site and update your profile.

The CAVMRC is excited to offer free continuing education for members in 2012! Training sessions will take place in both Northern and Southern California and will be geared toward the beginning disaster responder. The CAVMRC is fortunate to be working with speakers who are well-versed in animal disaster response. Their lectures will focus on a wide variety of topics intended to improve veterinary services for animals during disasters. No prerequisites are needed and course credit will be given for some of the training courses.

Veterinary professionals serve a vital function in disaster response and working together through the CAVMRC will improve our ability to respond to disasters in California. Dr. Grant Miller, CVMA Director of Regulatory Affairs, is the CAVMRC coordinator and is available at (916) 649-0599 or gmiller@cvma.net should you have any questions about joining the CAVMRC.