

Boots on the Ground: Arizona

[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Ted Pestorius] CDC's Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response leads the agency's preparedness and response activities. We work with local, state, tribal, national, territorial, and international public health partners by providing direction, support, and coordination. I'm your host, Ted Pestorius, and I'd like to welcome you to "Boots on the Ground," where we talk with CDC public health professionals in the field to see how their work affects local health preparedness and response.

Today, I'm interviewing Lisa Speissegger, a CDC public health advisor working at the Arizona Department of Health Services' Bureau of Public Health Emergency Preparedness. She'll tell us about her work with the Strategic National Stockpile program, which has large quantities of medicine and medical supplies to protect the public if there's a public health emergency. Lisa will also tell us about her experiences responding to the wildfires that occurred in Arizona in the summer of 2013. Thanks for joining us today, Lisa.

[Lisa Speissegger] Thank you for inviting me.

[Ted Pestorius] As a CDC public health advisor responding to emergencies, what does "Boots on the Ground" mean to you?

[Lisa Speissegger] Well, "Boots on the Ground" is really a good title for this definition because that's basically what we are. We are public health professionals trained in preparedness techniques that are able to go and assist the state immediately in a specific activity, whether it's responding to something or whether it's planning for something that's going to happen. My particular specialty is in strategic national stockpile issues on behalf of the Division of State and Local Readiness, but my main job is making sure I help the state of Arizona provide people medical equipment and medicines that they may need in an emergency—and that requires a great deal of planning.

[Ted Pestorius] I understand you also assisted with responding to the Arizona wildfires.

[Lisa Speissegger] In Arizona, wildfires happen every summer and this particular summer, because of our prolonged drought, wildfires were particularly devastating and close in to where people live. They were very close to people's property and a lot of people lost homes, and tragically, we lost 19 young firefighters in dealing with these two fires. And we are still recovering from that and figuring out how to deal with that. Arizona Department of Health Services typically responds to fires by ensuring that people who are vulnerable are out of harm's way. So, that includes making sure that licensed nursing homes, daycare facilities, and group homes are out of the range of the fire. This year, we also had the experience of helping support one of the shelters by providing them beds and pillows and sheets and blankets so that people

had a place to sleep. Typically, we don't deploy those assets, but this year, because there was such a shortage and the shelters were so overwhelmed, we did.

[Ted Pestorius] So what was your role in the response? Do you have any personal stories?

[Lisa Speissegger] What we did, basically, to respond to the wildfires that was different this year was to provide bariatric specialty beds for the Red Cross in their shelter up in Wickenburg. We were given the call to start pulling together the order of these beds at about 9 o'clock in the morning. We'd never assembled a bed before and we had 25 beds to assemble, and we wanted to get up there as soon as possible. Bariatric beds are specialty hospital beds, so they're a little more challenging than a typical cot and a mattress. And, after assembling the first bed, we got it down to about 15 minutes a bed. But, we were really fortunate. We had a really good team that we pulled together and we were able to get everything up there before night fall.

[Ted Pestorius] What does being prepared mean to you?

[Lisa Speissegger] Well, being prepared means being aware of your situation. As you know here in Atlanta, being prepared means you're going to be prepared for a severe rain storm, for a tornado, for things like that. In Arizona, an emergency can happen in a very different way. If you break down in a car in Arizona and you don't have water in your car, you are going to be in trouble. Severe heat is really a killer in our state. So, it's being aware of where you are and what things can happen to you there. That will make you take the actions you need to take in order to keep yourself and your family safe.

[Ted Pestorius] I'd like to thank you for being here today, Lisa.

[Lisa Speissegger] Oh, thank you. I appreciate it.

[Ted Pestorius] For more information on CDC's preparedness and response activities, follow @cdcready on Twitter or visit cdc.gov/phpr.

Thanks for joining us for "Boots on the Ground." Stay tuned for more interviews in this podcast series. Until next time, I'm Ted Pestorius.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.