

Boots on the Ground: Maryland

[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 public health professionals in the field to see how their work affects local health preparedness and response.

With me on the phone today is Commander Artensie Flowers, Planning Program Manager for the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. We'll discuss her work as a field public health adviser and what she does to carry out strategic planning, training, exercises, and local health preparedness. Welcome, Artensie.

[Artensie Flowers] Thank you.

[Ted Pestorius] What does "Boots on the Ground" mean to you? And how does this role reflect CDC's efforts?

[Artensie Flowers] Well, "Boots on the Ground" means to me that I'm here. I'm here at the state level, I'm here in the state of Maryland, and I can be the eyes and ears for CDC. I think that it's important to help fulfill the mission of CDC. It's important to have field staff assigned at the state level so we can serve as "Boots on the Ground."

[Ted Pestorius] And why is your job important to public health security and emergency preparedness and response?

[Artensie Flowers] As my colleagues in Maryland tease, I speak the CDC language and really what that means is that I assist CDC with translating their grant requirements into a message that the Department of Health can understand, as well as the local health departments. As "Boots on the Ground," I provide on-site, hands-on technical assistance. So, I think my job is important because I'm able to take the broad guidance from CDC and break it down to achievable parts.

[Ted Pestorius] So, Artensie, tell us more about your work with the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

[Artensie Flowers] I am responsible for assisting Maryland with strategic planning for public health preparedness, as well as training exercises and local health preparedness. I assist them with gathering of staff for planning meetings. We sit down and talk about what some of the goals and objectives are, and we put together a monthly plan, a quarterly plan, as well as the yearly plan to assist with carrying out the activities.

[Ted Pestorius] So what motivates and inspires you to help communities improve their health preparedness and response efforts?

[Artensie Flowers] I am motivated by the unpredictability of what the public health preparedness and response world brings to you. On some days, I am developing strategic plans for Maryland. On other days, I am conducting or delivering training for the department staff or for the local health department, even the hospitals. While at other times, I am actually responding to real-time emergencies.

I also work with a great group of people here in Maryland, and every day I look at them and I am truly motivated because they really strive to be the best in whatever they do. That keeps me going because I know that everything that we do is geared toward preparing and protecting the residents of Maryland and, ultimately, helping CDC fulfill its mission toward state and local health preparedness.

[Ted Pestorius] Finally, what can people do to prepare *their* communities for a public health emergency?

[Artensie Flowers] Well, actually, I think the first thing that people can do is prepare themselves. In fact, our office today actually had a personal preparedness training for the Department of Health staff. So, one of the things that we taught in this personal preparedness course is for the individuals to first prepare themselves through making a preparedness kit, having a plan in place, and also, more importantly, staying informed and being informed about what's going on. So, I think that it's their personal preparedness, then go out and help their community be prepared.

[Ted Pestorius] Artensie, thank you so much for joining us today.

[Artensie Flowers] Thank you.

[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-dot-cdc-gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.