



## PHEP STORIES FROM THE FIELD: TENNESSEE

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**CDC's Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP) cooperative agreement program is a critical source of funding, guidance, and technical assistance for state, local, tribal, and territorial public health departments to strengthen their public health preparedness capabilities. Since 9/11, the PHEP program has saved lives by building and maintaining a nationwide public health emergency management system that enables communities to rapidly respond to public health threats.**

### The Incident

In October 2013, a bus crash on Interstate 40 in east Tennessee resulted in nine fatalities and left 27 people injured.

### The Response

TDH activated the Regional Communications Center and Family Assistance Center within an hour after the crash.

### The Outcomes

Families of the injured could be near their loved ones and receive appropriate fatality and mental health support services.

In October 2013, a bus crash on Interstate 40 in east Tennessee resulted in nine fatalities and left 27 people injured. The Tennessee Department of Health (TDH) collaborated with local partners to quickly manage the mass causality incident and **integrate public health in emergency responses, leading and coordinating the public health and healthcare sectors.**

Within minutes after the crash, TDH activated the Regional Medical Communications Center and its PHEP-supported technology systems to alert area hospitals and direct emergency medical services (EMS) units to available medical centers. Within an hour, local health department staff had deployed a family assistance center at the University of Tennessee Medical Center, where all of the injured had been routed. This allowed at least 21 families to be near their loved ones and receive disaster mental health support, all activities supported by PHEP funding.

The public health department had worked over the last decade to strengthen its relationship with the forensic center and other response partners to streamline needed health services during a public health incident. After the bus crash, the forensic center quickly alerted staff at the health department and other response partners as soon as the deceased were processed and prepared for release; an especially critical task as only one person arrived from the scene with identification. The health department then notified the families at the family assistance center. Following an established protocol, the family assistance center integrated fatality, clerical, and mental health support services such as grief counseling with the release of the deceased from the coroner's office within 24 hours after the crash.

