



## **Vermont Alliance for Response Kick-off Forum**

August 31, 2009

Billings Farm and Museum and the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park, Woodstock, Vermont

More than 90 participants from around the state gathered for the Vermont Alliance for Response Forum on August 31, 2009. Convened by the Vermont Historical Society, the day-long meeting took place at the beautiful Billings Farm & Museum and Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park, in Woodstock, Vermont.

Barbara Farr, Director of Vermont Emergency Management (VEM), told participants from cultural institutions, "You are not alone." She talked about her excitement on encountering historic documents at a regional meeting hosted by the Massachusetts State Archives. "Of course we want to work together – you're protecting our history in Vermont." Director Farr, who stayed all day at the forum, extended an invitation to participants to take part in VEM's Second Annual Vermont Emergency Preparedness Conference.

An emergency scenario also gave the audience a sense of the variety of pressures on emergency responders and the complexity of an event that effects the whole community. Deb Spackman, who is both director of the Norman Williams Public Library and a volunteer firefighter and EMT, stressed the importance of talking together before disaster happens. She said she wanted local responders to understand her institution and its assets. "If something happens at my library," Spackman said, "I won't get to call the shots."

Woodstock Fire Chief Butch Sutherland, another scenario participant, unexpectedly returned in the afternoon as Incident Commander when a forum participant smelled smoke at a breakout session on fire safety. Everyone did just what they should. Participants evacuated the building in an orderly fashion. The fire department arrived promptly and prevented any serious damage from a smoking refrigerator coil. Fire expert Nick Artim demonstrated the flexibility essential in any emergency and reconvened his session outdoors.

The Vermont Alliance for Response Steering Committee will meet again October 22 to discuss plans for follow-up initiatives. Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training is on the agenda, along with other educational and strategic program possibilities.