



## **WVU researchers serve as delegates to national emergency management conference**

Two researchers from West Virginia University served as state delegates to the national "Conference on Emergency Management and Individuals with Disabilities and the Elderly" held in Washington, D.C. June 28-30.

Individuals from over 40 states attended the conference to determine how to strengthen the capacity of states to assist targeted populations with functional needs in an emergency or disaster, as well as work together for the adoption and implementation of ideas statewide. Efforts also include helping define a national strategy for policy development.

Mark Fischer, associate director for program operations at WVU's VMC/Homeland Security Programs, was appointed by Gov. Joe Manchin and Secretary of Military Affairs and Public Safety James Spears to attend as a delegate for West Virginia.

Lori Risk, assistant director at the WVU Center for Excellence in Disabilities, a part of the Robert C. Byrd Health Sciences Center, participated as a delegate representing West Virginia's network of programs funded by the Administration on Developmental Disabilities.

The two were selected based on their ongoing research at WVU involving special needs populations and disaster planning.

"WVU's initial work within West Virginia has placed us in a leadership role of research in special needs populations and disaster," Fischer said. "A limited number of organizations have engaged in this type of research to the extent we have."

The conference was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt and DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff requested that governors identify individuals representing state offices of homeland security, emergency management, special needs and aging to attend the conference.

Fischer and Risk's past and current work, credentials and knowledge base provided the basis for their appointments.

Fischer holds a master of public administration degree from the University of Central Florida and is completing his doctorate in political science at WVU.

His background includes extensive emergency planning and response experience. He is a contract instructor for FEMA with the National Fire Academy at the National Emergency Training Center, and holds a designation as a master exercise practitioner.

Risk has 14 years of experience in healthcare, rehabilitation and disability services. She is a licensed occupational therapist with a master of occupational therapy degree from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh.

She has worked collaboratively with state agencies and organizations to improve services and support for individuals with disabilities, including traumatic brain injury and spinal cord injury through training,

technical assistance, resource coordination, curriculum development and interdisciplinary training for masters level college students going into allied health fields.

Both Fischer and Risk look forward to the possibilities developed at the conference.

“There’s a great consensus across the country concerning defining problems and finding solutions when it comes to planning that includes consideration for special needs populations,” Fischer said. “What remains is the actual development of solutions and including them in the response process. We’re ready to move forward in this type of work.”

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