

Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative

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Mississippi River Cities Announce Broad International Partnership to Contain Pandemic, Stem Economic Fallout

April 27, 2020, St. Louis, MO – Mayors of the [Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative](#) (MRCTI) announced a broad international partnership today with partners working to assist communities facing both the pandemic and multiple hazards including flooding and catastrophic storms.

Mayors Along America's Most Essential Waterway Secure Coalition

Mayors from all ten states along the Mississippi River have been working steadily throughout the COVID-19 crisis to build capacity within their emergency response systems to address both the pandemic and multiple hazards.

“Our Mayors began working to limit the pandemic earlier than many because we could see it may hit us near the height of flood season – one of the most dangerous times of the year for our corridor,” explained [Sharon Weston Broome, Mayor of Baton Rouge, LA and Co-Chair of MRCTI](#).

“An unprecedented mounting of threats calls for a unique and unprecedented response and that is exactly what we have been pursuing with results linking to finance, engineering, supply chain, disaster response, and public service organizations and companies” said [Bob Gallagher, Mayor of Bettendorf, IA and Co-Chair of MRCTI](#).

Beginning in early March, Mayors began assembling capacities from stakeholders globally including Rotary International, CDP Global, Seacor Holdings, Tetra Tech, Sciens Water, Columbia University, and the U.S. Heartland China Association.

“We have 450 offices in over 23 countries worldwide. We knew we could help our Mayors meet the layered crisis of pandemic and major storms so we worked to connect them to suppliers both state-side and overseas to address their overwhelming PPE demand,” detailed [Jeremy Travis, Tetra Tech Business Unit Leader and Past Chair of the MRCTI Corporate Advisory Board](#).

“We have been pooling the contributions of both corporate and individual donors in the U.S. and abroad and we wanted to funnel some of that supply into the Mississippi River Valley (25,000 units just last week) – MRCTI cities offers the infrastructure to make that partnership feasible,” said [Bob Holden, former Governor of Missouri and Chairman of the U.S. China Heartland Association](#).

Our Small Businesses and City Revenues Have Been Decimated and it's Getting Worse

Cities along the Mississippi River went into the pandemic facing terrific revenue challenges due to the nationally historic floods of 2019. FEMA reimbursements from last year have yet to arrive in many Mississippi River cities and the floods destroyed 80 percent of the economy in some places along the waterway. This left little revenue to contain COVID-19 through the purchase of expensive and increasingly rare PPE. The Stimulus will help, but when payments will arrive in cities and how much remains uncertain. Cities are looking at revenue shortfalls from six to above ten percent (6% to more than 10%) from fighting the pandemic for only 1.5 months.

“My region sustained the largest tornado in the State of Mississippi’s history on April 12 then was hit again by another tornado one week later. We have to respond to these events with or without enough equipment to limit contagion. I know we’ll receive stimulus funds but I don’t know when and I’m not positive how much will finally make it to my city,” stated [George Flaggs of Vicksburg, MS and MRCTI Mississippi Chair](#).

“More than half a million people have applied for unemployment in my state of Minnesota alone. Less than ten million applied for unemployment nationally during the financial crisis and we’ve just been fighting this for less than two months. Broad regional coalitions are going to be needed to make sure areas and people don’t get left behind. We need partnerships like this to give our cities amplified voice and capacity,” emphasized [Melvin Carter, Mayor of St. Paul, MN](#).

“The cities and ports along the Mississippi River are essential to the global commodity supply chain, support businesses, and don’t necessarily have the capacity to navigate and secure resources from complex and overlapping federal outlets like the CARES Act. That’s where we can offer guidance and ultimately increase funding for MRCTI cities through our firm Witt O’Brien’s, which is part of the Seacor family. We deploy disaster response consulting all over the world and U.S. communities with the details and processes to maximize Federal assistance. We were connected to the Initiative through past MRCTI Corporate Advisory Board Chair Tim Power of SCF Marine which is also part of Seacor,” said [Andy Robinson, Managing Director at Witt O’Brien’s](#).

More PPE is Needed Every Day

Masks, isolation suits, gloves, goggles, and face shields all are in high demand with donated supplies even more urgently sought. As PPE comes into the US, even small batches can save lives.

“My city of 12,000 people has only a few COVID-19 cases, but 100 surgical masks or 50 N95 masks can make a big difference. Just that small supply can ensure my first responders don’t contract the virus and spread it around just doing their jobs every day,” emphasized [Kevin Smith of Helena-West Helena, AR](#).

“We are happy to help the city of Helena. They had sustained flooding, a tornado, and their healthcare facilities needed additional supplies. We’re here in New York where we know the need is great, but we also wanted to send our discrete supplies to where they would make the most difference on the ground,” calibrated [Alexander Loucopoulos, Partner at Sciens Water and a member of the MRCTI Corporate Advisory Board](#).

New Challenges Require New Solutions

At a more innovative level, MRCTI is working with Rotary Clubs and Districts to activate their disaster assistance grants to the regional scale by partnering with Rotary Clubs and cities along the Mississippi River to apply for grants from the global organization of the Rotary Foundation International for the purchase of additional PPE.

“We have a Rotary Club in just about every city along the Mississippi River and that is where the need is great right now. The U.S. now has the largest outbreak of COVID-19 in the world and those areas facing other disasters with the added complications of vulnerable populations, as well as drained municipal treasuries due to last year’s floods make MRCTI the best partner to place resources where they are needed,” asserted [Floyd Lancia, Director of Zones 30/31 of Rotary International](#).

“American cities are facing a triple threat: climate change, COVID-19 and the economic downturn,” said [Katie Walsh, Head of Cities, States & Regions at CDP North America](#). “Mississippi River cities are up against spring flooding, and soon, extreme summer heat – already significant challenges in a typical year. To endure the next few months, cities must rally behind sustainable solutions. This will not only help cities to weather this storm, it will build resilience and protect vulnerable populations who have been hardest hit by COVID-19 and ongoing environmental injustices.”

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Mayors available for media inquiries:

- Hon. Bob Gallagher – City of Bettendorf, IA & MRCTI Co-Chair
- Hon. Sharon Weston Broome – City of Baton Rouge, LA & MRCTI Co-Chair
- Hon. Melvin Carter – City of St. Paul, MN
- Hon. George Flaggs – City of Vicksburg, MS
- Hon. Kevin Smith – City of Helena, West Helena, AR
- Hon. Bob Holden, Former Governor of Missouri, Chairman of USHCA

Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative ([MRCTI](#)) is a coalition of 95 mayors from across the Mississippi River Corridor which spans along ten states from Minnesota to Louisiana. The Mississippi River provides drinking water to more than 20 million people and 50 cities. More than 40 percent of the nation's agricultural commodity output moves on the Mississippi River. The River's resources support 1.5 million jobs and create \$496.7 billion in annual revenue.