

By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

The Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD), serving eight counties, including Chase and Perkins, has hired Heidi Wheeler of Imperial as the new Emergency Response Coordinator. She began the transition to her new position in August, and recently resumed full responsibility.

Wheeler had been the Preparedness Planner for SWNPHD since October, 2007.

“I am absolutely thrilled to be Southwest Nebraska’s Emergency Response Coordinator,” Wheeler said. “The greatest part of the job is meeting and working with emergency personnel from our district and across the state.”

Wheeler said the staff at SWNPHD has been “incredible” to work with. She looks forward to the challenges and rewards of the position.

“I absolutely love what I’m doing,” Wheeler exclaimed.

As Preparedness Planner, Wheeler worked with Chase County Emergency Management, Chase County Community Hospital and the Imperial Volunteer Fire Department and EMS in planning a mock disaster.

Monday, she worked with Dundy County Emergency Management on a tabletop exercise. Different organizations such as fire departments, the county attorney, law enforcement and the hospital sat around a table, concocted an emergency situation, then discussed how to respond.

“We figure out the issues before it happens, and take away the lessons we need to address. It’s a way to learn,” Wheeler explained.

The Emergency Response Coordinator is responsible for SWNPHD’s emergency response plan. Other duties include working with the State of Nebraska in fulfilling the specifics of the bioterrorism contract, working with public health partners in planning preparedness exercises, education and training in preparedness and testing systems for response.

“Heidi’s background in EMS and her veterinarian technician experience, along with her experience as Preparedness Planner, makes her an excellent fit for the Emergency Response Coordinator position,” according to Myra Stoney, Director of SWNPHD.

SWNPHD has offices in McCook and Imperial. Wheeler will primarily work from the Imperial office, which is located in the Chase County Community Hospital annex, or the former Frenchman Valley Family Practice offices.

Her Imperial hours are Tuesday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.