
Hurricane Season 2008

Disasters create a wide range of emergency needs, more than any one organization can meet. It takes a large network of people and organizations to ensure that communities and individuals get all the help they need during and after a disaster. The American Red Cross is one member of the local, state and federal disaster response community. While we can't meet every need, we can work with our partners to ensure that we do our part to keep people safe and comfortable during trying times.

Red Cross Services

Q What kind of disaster relief services does the Red Cross provide?

A The Red Cross responds on the scene of emergencies to help provide for the urgent needs of those who have been affected by disaster. We focus on providing safe shelter, feeding victims and emergency workers, providing mental health and emotional support services, providing basic first aid, and distributing clean-up supplies and comfort items. By meeting with each affected individual or family the Red Cross can determine what kind of emergency assistance is most appropriate.

Q What kinds of emergency services are not provided by the Red Cross?

A The Red Cross doesn't have the expertise, equipment or resources to perform every disaster service. Services such as evacuation coordination, search and rescue, advanced medical care, pet sheltering, and medical sheltering are best performed by government agencies or organizations that have the resources, the trained workers, and the expertise to carry out those functions. We work closely with the groups involved in those services to ensure that we can meet the needs of people who may come to us with those needs.

Q Why doesn't the Red Cross accept donations of clothing and other small items?

A Our focus during a disaster is getting help to large numbers of people in a short time. We try to focus our workers on that goal and often don't have the resources that it takes to sort, process and store, and transport small donations.

In addition, we want to be consistent in the help we give to disaster victims -- cash donations allow us to purchase the large quantities of goods that help us do that. Financial donations also help us meet any specific needs a disaster client might have.

Q How does the Red Cross pay for the services it provides?

A We rely on the donations of the American people to support our work. The Red Cross has the ability to start disaster work immediately after an event because of the Disaster Relief Fund. This fund provides the money to pay for day to day disasters, such as house fires, as well as larger scale events. Because we have money in the fund year round, we can jump start disaster relief efforts before fundraising efforts begin.

Q Does the Red Cross receive federal funding for its disaster relief efforts?

A The Red Cross does not receive a regular appropriation from Congress. On rare

occasions, the Red Cross has asked for a one-time appropriation from Congress to cover the cost of a large disaster. This last occurred in 2004 during the series of four hurricanes that hit the Gulf Coast.

Q Is the Red Cross a federal agency?

A While the Red Cross is chartered by Congress to provide disaster relief and other services, we are not considered a federal agency. We often work closely with federal agencies during disasters, leading to confusion about our status. But it is important to note that we do not have the same legal standing as federal agencies.

Q How many feeding vehicles, kitchens and other equipment does the Red Cross have ready for hurricane season?

A Every disaster response begins with the local chapter and there are more than 750 chapters nationwide to help in times of emergency. We also have more than 300 mobile feeding vehicles around the country that can be moved to disaster affected areas, five kitchens (including two that can serve 30,000 hot meals per day) and nine satellite communication vehicles that can provide the Red Cross with phone and internet service in the absence of critical infrastructure.

Q If people have to evacuate to a Red Cross shelter, what should they bring?

A The Red Cross encourages those who plan to stay in a Red Cross shelter to bring the following items for each member of their family: prescription and emergency medication, extra clothing, pillows, blankets, hygiene supplies, important documents and other comfort items. Additionally, special items for children and infants, such as diapers, formulas and toys, should be brought, along with other special items for family members who are elderly or disabled.

Q What is the Red Cross role in sheltering animals?

A Red Cross shelters must accommodate a wide range of people. Along with infants, children, and seniors, we may also have people with pet allergies, asthma, or other health issues and/or those with a fear of animals.

- For the well-being of *all* people who need our support, it is not possible to accept pets into Red Cross shelters.
- Plans for the sheltering of pets are handled by local or state government and animal welfare agencies. The Red Cross strives to be an active participant in that planning process and to convene planning meetings when appropriate.
- **One exception:** Service animals for people with disabilities are an exception. Service animals are not considered pets, and they may stay with their owner in the shelter. Shelter workers will do all they can to accommodate them comfortably.

Q How is the Red Cross helping pet owners?

A The Red Cross is working actively to help solve this issue. We've asked all of our chapters to assemble referral lists of pet friendly hotels, kennels, veterinarians, and

animal welfare agencies that can accept pets during a disaster. In addition, we can support pet shelters by providing food, cots, blankets, and first aid to the people who staff the pet shelters. In many communities, the Red Cross is working directly with animal welfare groups to find locations where pets can be separated from the general population but housed in or near the human shelter.

Q Sometimes the Red Cross does not open shelters close to my home in a hurricane evacuation. Why not?

A The Red Cross opens shelters during hurricane evacuations *in areas where individuals and families will be safe from the most intense storms*. The decisions about where Red Cross shelters will be opened during an evacuation are based on the most technologically advanced, scientific models available. After the storm and the danger has passed, we may open shelters and service centers in the disaster area as families begin to move back to their homes for clean up and recovery.

Q What do you say to people who think the American Red Cross standards for opening shelters during hurricanes are too high?

A The Red Cross symbol represents safety, security and comfort to those seeking shelter. When people see a Red Cross on a shelter they trust it will be reasonably safe. Our shelter standards protect human life. They are based on the best scientific and historical information available today.

These standards ensure that the Red Cross opens and manages shelters in areas where people should be reasonably safe and secure.

Q How does the American Red Cross plan and prepare for the hurricane season?

A Hurricane preparedness and planning is an ongoing annual process. The Red Cross begins planning, meeting, and communicating with all risk states for the next hurricane season almost as soon as the current season "ends." Because our jurisdiction extends to the Western Pacific (Guam, American Samoa, and Northern Mariana Islands), the hurricane/typhoon "season" can be year-round.

Red Cross chapters:

- Ensure that shelter agreements are up to date and visit each facility annually to ensure its adequacy for use as an evacuation shelter.
- Ensure that there are an adequate number of trained personnel to staff shelters, local government emergency operations centers, and initiative other disaster relief activities.
- Ensure that all equipment and vehicles are in proper working order.

Red Cross at national headquarters:

- Ensures that hurricane action plans are current.
- Ensures adequate supplies are stocked in its warehouses located throughout the U.S. and its territories.
- Updates hurricane-prone state demographic analyses.
- Checks the availability of its volunteer leadership.

- Updates Statements of Understanding between the Red Cross and cooperating organizations and agencies.
- Works with chapters to assure availability of trained people.
- Ensures emergency response vehicles are ready and available.

Preparedness

Q How does the Red Cross help the public prepare for hurricanes?

A Educating the public about how to prepare for and respond to the threat of hurricanes helps reduce loss of life, injuries, and property damage. Each Red Cross chapter is expected to establish ongoing community disaster education initiatives for local residents.

Q What should families do to prepare for a hurricane?

A First, get or assemble a disaster supplies kit containing the following items:

- At least a three day supply of water (1 gallon per person, per day);
- At least a three day supply of nonperishable food that does not require cooking or refrigeration
- A manual can opener
- A flashlight with extra batteries
- A hand-crank or battery-operated radio with extra batteries
- A first aid kit and medication
- Cash and copies of important documents; and
- Specific items for family members with additional needs, such as children, the elderly and people with disabilities. A full list of items is available at www.redcross.org.

You may purchase an Emergency Preparedness Kit with basic disaster supplies that you can add items to that will meet your specific needs at www.redcross.org or purchase items and store them in a sturdy, sealable, easy-to-carry container.

Second, make a disaster plan which includes a family communications plan and an evacuation plan. Choose an out-of-area emergency contact person and two places for your family to meet; one right outside your home where you can escape in case of a sudden emergency, like a fire, and one outside your neighborhood. Plan how to take care of your pets.

Third, be informed. Find out how local authorities will contact you during a disaster or other emergency. Listen to local radio, television or NOAA weather radio stations or channel when disaster threatens and follow the guidance of your local officials. If you are told to evacuate, do so immediately.

For more information on how to prepare your home, work or school for disasters such as a hurricane, contact your local Red Cross chapter or visit www.redcross.org

Q How can family members stay in touch during an evacuation or other

disaster?

A The American Red Cross recommends that families designate an out-of-area emergency contact. This person should have all family emergency phone numbers and contacts at all times. If family members are evacuated, the Red Cross recommends that they stay in contact with the designated individual. Everyone who has to evacuate is also urged to register their well being on the Red Cross Safe and Well website, available at www.redcross.org. This Internet tool allows people in disaster-affected areas to register their well-being using several pre-scripted messages. Family and friends can then log on and search for registered individuals to learn of their whereabouts and safety.

Q What should families do after a hurricane has passed?

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- Keep listening to NOAA Weather Radio or local radio or TV stations for instructions.
- If you evacuated, return home only when local officials tell you it is safe to do so.
- Avoid downed or dangling utility wires.
- Use flashlights in the dark; do NOT use candles.
- Before entering a building, check the outside for damage such as cracks in the foundation or broken utilities that make it too dangerous to enter.
- Smell for gas. If you detect a natural gas or propane odor or hear a hissing noise, leave immediately and contact the fire department or utility company.
- Beware of snakes, insects or animals driven to higher ground by floodwater.
- Throw out all food, beverages and medicine exposed to floodwaters and mud, including canned goods, capped bottles and sealed containers. *When in doubt, throw it out.*
- If a power outage occurs, turn off or disconnect all motor-driven appliances and fixtures to avoid damage from sudden surges when power is restored.

Q What mitigation activities can be done in regards to hurricane preparation?

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- Remove diseased or damaged tree limbs. Also, strategically remove branches so that wind can blow through the tree.
- Move or secure lawn furniture, outdoor decorations or ornaments, trash cans, hanging plants and anything else that can be picked up by wind and become a projectile.
- Install hurricane shutters or pre-cut 3/4" marine plywood for each window of your home. Install anchors for the plywood and pre-drill holes in the plywood so that you can put it up quickly.
- Reinforce double entry doors by adding bolts to the top and bottom of the inactive door.
- Install hurricane clips and straps to roofs. (Consult with a professional.)
- Install permanent shutters on your windows.
- Install protection to the outside areas of sliding glass doors.

- Elevate coastal homes. (Consult with a professional)
- Strengthen garage doors.
- Strengthen unreinforced masonry.

Q What's the difference between a hurricane WATCH and a hurricane WARNING?

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- **WATCH:** Hurricane conditions are possible in the specified area of the WATCH, usually within 36 hours.
- **WARNING:** Hurricane conditions are expected in the specified area of the WARNING, usually within 24 hours.

Q A hurricane is one of the most violent forces in nature. Why are they so dangerous?

A The damage and devastation of a hurricane can come in many different forms, including:

- **Storm Surge:** Storm surge is a large dome of water often 50 to 100 miles wide that sweeps across the coastline near where a hurricane makes landfall. The surge of high water topped by waves is devastating. The stronger the hurricane and the shallower the offshore water, the higher the surge will be. Along the immediate coast, storm surge is the greatest threat to life and property.
- **Storm Tide:** If the storm surge arrives at the same time as the high tide, the water height will be even greater. The storm tide is the combination of the storm surge and the normal astronomical tide. For example as hurricane moves ashore, a 15-foot surge added to the normal 2-foot tide creates a storm tide of 17 feet. This mound of water, topped by battering waves, moves ashore along an area of the coastline as much as 100 miles wide. The combination of the storm surge, battering waves, and high winds is deadly.
- **Winds:** Hurricane-force winds, 74 mph or more, can destroy poorly constructed buildings and mobile homes. Debris, such as signs, roofing material, siding, and small items left outside, become flying missiles in hurricanes. Winds often stay above hurricane strength well inland.
- **Heavy Rains/Floods:** Widespread torrential rains often in excess of 6 inches can produce deadly and destructive floods. This is the major threat to areas well inland.
- **Tornadoes:** Hurricanes also produce tornadoes, which add to the hurricane's destructive power. These tornadoes most often occur in thunderstorms embedded in rain bands well away from the center of the hurricane. However, they can also occur near the eyewall.

Q How can I help hurricane victims?

A The fastest and most effective way to assist the families affected by hurricanes and other disasters is through cash donations to the American Red Cross Disaster Relief Fund. All Red Cross disaster assistance is free, made possible by voluntary donations of

time and money from the American people. You can help the victims of thousands of disasters across the country each year, disasters like hurricanes, by making a financial gift to the American Red Cross Disaster Relief Fund, which enables the Red Cross to provide shelter, food, counseling and other assistance to victims of disaster. The American Red Cross honors donor intent. If you wish to designate your donation to a specific disaster please do so at the time of your donation. Call 1-800-REDCROSS or 1-800-257-7575 (Spanish). Contributions to the Disaster Relief Fund may be sent to your local American Red Cross chapter or to the American Red Cross, P. O. Box 37243, Washington, DC 20013. Internet users can make a secure online contribution by visiting www.redcross.org.