



Mass Care - Emergency Relief to the Community

The Red Cross provides emergency relief services on a congregate basis to communities affected by a disaster. These services include sheltering, feeding, distribution of needed items such as rakes, clean-up kits, and the provision of information about the availability of these services. To meet the need for food, shelter and relief supplies, the Red Cross works closely with partner agencies to help with mass care work.

Sheltering

The Red Cross offers a safe place to stay and rest before, during and after a disaster. Shelters are often the first contact disaster victims have with the Red Cross. These facilities address basic human needs for food and shelter and may be located in public and private facilities such as schools, churches and commercial buildings. Red Cross chapters work at the local level to identify and secure agreements for appropriate buildings to be used as disaster shelters. The Red Cross coordinates sheltering activities with local and state government and other partner organizations.



A Red Cross worker entertains two children of the Everette family while their mother completes paperwork at a shelter in Birmingham, Alabama.

Hector Emanuel / American Red Cross



After a hurricane or other disasters, many neighborhoods remained without electricity for days. Allen Owens and his children are happy to receive a hot dinner.

Bonnie Gillespie / American Red Cross

Feeding

The Red Cross provides meals, snacks and beverages to disaster victims, emergency workers and clean-up crews. Working closely with partners--in particular the Southern Baptist Convention and Salvation Army--the Red Cross may use stationary or mobile kitchens to prepare meals using donated or purchased food. Caterers or local restaurants may also provide meals so that the needs of disaster affected communities are met. In addition, pre-packaged and ready-to-eat meals may be used to meet the immediate needs of the community if access and power are limited. Red Cross chapters initiate mobile feeding within 6 hours of safe access for Red Cross staff and vehicles, and feeding activities increase within 72 hours of the disaster to meet the disaster-caused need. All Red Cross and partner feeding facilities meet local health requirements for food safety and sanitation.

Distribution of Needed Relief Supplies

The Red Cross provides items essential to basic survival, health and sanitation as quickly as possible to those affected by disaster. Items needed for clean-up and recovery may also be provided to those affected by disaster when they return to their homes. These items are often purchased locally or donated. Distribution of needed items uses a phased system of delivery, initially supplying essential, life sustaining items and later supplying clean-up and recovery items. These items can be distributed via mobile delivery or at fixed sites. To expedite the delivery of these items to clients, the Red Cross has pre-positioned commonly needed supplies in warehouses throughout the country.

Community Programs

The Red Cross also provides support during a disaster with Emergency Aid Stations, Respite Centers and Service Centers. The Mass Care team coordinates and facilitates this activity with Disaster Health Services, Disaster Mental Health and Partner Services.

Serving the Broader Community

The storms and disasters of the past decade have emphasized the importance of providing for the needs of the disabled, elderly, medically dependent, and other population groups within our communities during disasters. The increasingly large segment of the population living with significant physical and mental disabilities and the growing aged population has resulted in some changes to approaches to sheltering. A common misunderstanding in today's environment is that many elderly or people with disabilities who live independently in our communities every day would not "qualify" to stay at a traditional Red Cross shelter due reliance on assistive devices and/or reliance on support personnel. But different disabilities create different needs, and Red Cross shelter managers and workers understand that there is no such thing as a "one size fits all" approach. Needs are often defined by the environment and the availability of family members, friends or health care agency personnel to provide assistance or special care for tasks that the individual cannot perform alone.



A Red Cross worker helps an elderly woman into a wheelchair.
Daniel Cima / American Red Cross.

Caring for our Children



In the children's area, Red Cross volunteer Roberta Ainciart paints with young evacuees at the Red Cross shelter in Mira Mesa High School. 2007 California Wildfires.
Talia Frenkel / American Red Cross

When disaster strikes, children are vulnerable to violence and emotional harm. They need activities and a safe place to play, socialize and express themselves so they can recover. The American Red Cross has joined with the Church of the Brethren's Children's Disaster Services, Save the Children, the Southern Baptist Convention, and other local organizations to ensure children are not forgotten in America's emergency evacuation shelters. "Safe Space" kits are provided in partnership with Save the Children in shelters to provide children with supervised activities in a secure location. These pre-packaged kits contain materials to mark off a special area for children, activity supplies (such as art materials, books, games and toys), and other materials to assist children and families in a shelter environment. The Church of the Brethren and the Southern Baptist Convention programs provide temporary childcare in shelters and service centers.