

# American Red Cross

## Disaster Relief Program

The American Red Cross has been assisting disaster victims since the Michigan forest fires of 1881. Today, through a network of more than 1,300 local chapters, the American Red Cross provides a nationwide program of disaster mitigation, planning, response and recovery.

The American Red Cross is required by congressional charter (Act of Congress of January 5, 1905, as amended, 36 U.S. Code 3, Fifth) to undertake relief activities for the purpose of mitigating the suffering caused by disaster. The American Red Cross has both legal and moral mandates in the field of disaster relief and does not have either the power or the right to surrender these mandates. It may determine the scope, policies and procedures of its disaster relief program, within the framework established by the local charter, but the American Red Cross must carry out its basic obligation to mitigate suffering caused by disaster.

### *Red Cross Disaster Policies*

The American Red Cross is an independent, voluntary body dedicated to performing the relief obligations entrusted to it by Congress. It cooperates with private and governmental bodies in doing so. The American Red Cross provides both mass care (feeding and sheltering) and emergency assistance to individuals with urgent and verified disaster caused needs. Such help is given on the basis of uniform guidelines and procedures and includes utilization of available community resources, both public and private, on a preplanned basis. When necessary, the American Red Cross at the national level provides operational direction and support, including supplies and financial resources when required to augment the resources of the community and the local chapter.

### *How the Red Cross Disaster Program Works*

Through its preparedness program, the American Red Cross maintains its capability to take immediate action to provide emergency assistance to any number of people affected by, and emergency workers involved in, disaster or the threat of disaster. Assistance may be in the form of fixed or mobile feeding sites, clothing, mass or individual shelter, first aid or other supplementary medical care, or the provision of other basic needs.

The American Red Cross provides blood and blood products for disaster victims and handles welfare inquiries from anxious relatives outside the disaster area. Simultaneously, or as soon as possible, the American Red Cross also provides to individual families help with their most urgent needs so that they can resume living as families rather than in shelters. Assistance to families is given on the basis of verified need. Help may include funds for such items as, food, clothing, housing, fuel, rent, necessary furniture, health care, transportation and minor home

repairs to make a home livable again. The American Red Cross also refers families to available governmental resources and, if necessary, assists families in making application for such aid. The American Red Cross may refer disaster victims to other ongoing programs that could benefit the family.

All American Red Cross help to disaster victims is an outright gift. No repayment is required or requested. No American Red Cross disaster supplies are sold.

### ***Responsibility for Action in a Disaster***

Responsibility for American Red Cross disaster preparedness and response is nationwide and rests with the total organization, whose basic policies are established by a volunteer Board of Governors. The national sector is responsible for establishing and implementing policies and regulations that govern American Red Cross activities, for giving administrative and technical supervision and guidance to chapters, and for maintaining the organization's financial controls.

The chapter is the local unit. Every community in the United States and its territories comes within the geographic jurisdiction of an American Red Cross chapter. Chapters, assisted by the national sector, are responsible for the recruiting, training and utilization of volunteers; the pre-placement of adequate vehicles, equipment and supplies; and the maintenance of Disaster Action Teams for immediate response. When a disaster is of such magnitude that local resources are inadequate, Disaster Services at national headquarters coordinates the actions of the total organization in providing necessary support to the affected area.