

## The American Red Cross' Disaster Protocol:

### The Delaware Chapter

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Each day, thousands of people are affected by natural and man-made disasters. As one of the most recognized humanitarian organizations in the United States, the American Red Cross (ARC) provides emergency assistance, disaster relief, and disaster preparedness education wherever it is needed.

With the support of volunteers, donors and employees, the ARC actively works on preparedness, response, and recovery of disasters through its array of programs and initiatives.

It is important to recognize that the ARC is not only present during and after disasters, but even before disaster strikes.

The ARC prides itself on proactively intervening to help communities be “Red Cross Ready.” ‘Red Cross Ready’ is a phrase known within and outside of the organization that refers to making a plan, building a disaster kit, and being informed about potential threats.

“We urge communities to have those types of [emergency preparedness] conversations with family and loved ones before a situation arises,” said Delmarva Red Cross Executive Director Theresa Young. “It means talking about having a meeting spot, talking about transportation, and making sure everyone has an emergency kit on hand. We want everyone to have that plan set, so when necessary, action can be taken swiftly and without the extra burden of making split-second logistical decisions.”

Being prepared before a crisis occurs can make all the difference in reducing endangerment and distress. It is essential to have an idea of which type of emergencies occur where you live, what preparedness steps you can take, what to do during an emergency, and how to repair and rebuild afterwards. ‘Red Cross Ready’ does not only apply for the person leading the household. The ‘Red Cross Ready’ website: <https://rdcrss.org/2NtbtWc> provides disaster safety tips, preparedness guides and safety checklist for children, people with disabilities, seniors, and even your fluffy companions.

One of the best examples of this preparedness principle is the Red Cross’ [Sound the Alarm](https://www.redcross.org/soundthealarm) initiative ([Soundthealarm.org](https://www.redcross.org/soundthealarm)), part of its continuing Home Fire Campaign. The cost-free effort was launched in 2014 to reduce the risk to serious injuries and deaths due to house fires.

According to ARC Delmarva Chapter Disaster Program Manager Sharon Jefferson-Hawkins, house fire statistics over a five-year period were evaluated in the chapter’s high-risk areas: spots with high density populations and low socioeconomic status. The chapter developed partnerships with neighborhoods in those areas to establish rapport with residents and eventually, for ARC volunteers and community stakeholders to schedule household visits to test and install missing or malfunctioning smoke alarms. Then trained volunteers sit down with the residents and review

how to create a fire escape plan for their home or wider community. Volunteers also go over management plans for disasters common to the area.

*Sound the Alarm* practices can potentially reduce the risk of house fire deaths in half. The initiative has directly led to 627 lives saved, the installation of more than 1.8 million free smoke alarms, and more than 783,000 homes made safer across more than 16,000 U.S. cities and towns. As is the case in Wilmington, Delaware, local fire departments join in the effort and bolster Sound the Alarm events.

## **Responding to Disasters**

Even with safety measures, disasters are inevitable. That is why the ARC plays a vital role in communities. The ARC holds a charter from the U.S. Congress that mandates response to disasters when called upon. Although not first responders, ARC volunteers and staff often render aid in the wake of hurricanes, tornadoes, flooding, or home fires, the most common disaster that prompts a Red Cross response. Local emergency managers and public safety officials determine the areas in which the ARC becomes involved.

“This planning is conducted through ongoing communication with city officials to ensure resource alignment,” Young said. “I have three states in my chapter: Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware. Each state has a different agreement with the American Red Cross to determine what type of support we can provide to that state’s emergency management officials.”

In the case of a major natural disaster, the ARC uses a 120-hour timeline – depending on the disaster’s epicenter – to start implementing a plan to determine where to stage materials, set up an evacuation or long-term shelter, handle meals and support basic life-sustaining needs. If the disaster shifts, the ARC shifts its plans. The ARC mobilizes volunteers and workers from across the country to help areas hit hardest by a disaster. From hurricanes, to flooding, devastating wildfires and home fires, with the support of donors, partners and volunteers, the ARC responds to an emergency every eight minutes somewhere in the country.

## **The Role of Volunteers in the Disaster Response**

As a volunteer lead organization, the ARC is able to provide its services through the generosity of their donors and the resourcefulness of volunteers. Ninety percent of what the ARC does is driven by the work and passion of volunteers.

A person may volunteer a moment, a day or a week of their valuable time for a disaster. During that period, the volunteer determines where their specialty may lie, and how they will be able to support during the disaster.

The ARC provides specific, structured trainings for volunteers before and during a disaster. Volunteers receive basic training and are certified in first aid, Cardio pulmonary resuscitation, and Automated external defibrillator. They also receive training specific to their role, such as how to run an emergency shelter, drive an emergency response vehicle, provide mass care, safely feed people, and manage supply logistics. Leadership training and communication courses are offered through external partners.

## Recovering from a Disaster

Red Cross volunteers can also play a significant role in mental health support following a traumatic experience.

“Imagine your home has been lost in a fire and you are standing off the street with your children who want to know where they will stay,” Young said. “We have Disaster Mental Health support there to not only help you with that moment and that conversation, but to also be there to help you rebuild your new normal.”

“Disaster Mental Health helps the person navigate all the things going through their mind to get them to ‘what do I need to do next?’ And that is a very essential aspect of recovery,” Young said. “In case of a disaster, we have people evacuating their home. When they arrive to a shelter, it is important that they have someone to talk to and address their emotional needs before they can start managing their next path of recovery. Having people there to just be a listening ear and to help understand what they are going through and then pinpoint a path for the next step is very important.”

Another part the ARC plays in disaster recovery is reunification. If family members are separated during a disaster, the ARC provides services to reconnect family members. In addition, the ARC attempts to close the recovery gap by providing an impacted individual or family with as many humanitarian services and resources as possible, reduce their financial burden if necessary and help them move forward into their new normal. Sometimes recovery is not always in a way that’s requested but is needed at the moment.

## Technology: A Turning Point in Disaster Response

The ARC has upgraded its use of technology in preparing, responding, and managing disasters. One of its most powerful applications is the disaster response and management tool called “Red Cross View (RC View).” This mobile application has incredible usefulness and scope for planning and delivery of services.

RC View enables the ARC and partners to share a visual situational awareness with near real-time data to better manage disaster operations. RC View is used to map out homes impacted by a disaster, note damage assessments conducted, help with risk analysis, and tally services delivered. It also provides the ARC with resources information, such as where emergency response vehicles are located, where meal distribution is taking place, and what communities require support. RC View integrates with local and national databases.

The organization has also invested in the development of multiple mobile disaster applications with expert information that anyone can download. The apps are found in app stores corresponding to one’s smartphone and are displayed on the ARC website.

One of the most commonly used ARC apps is the Blood Donor App, a mobile app featuring nearby ARC blood drives, appointment scheduling, blood donation journeys, and geo-targeted blood shortage alerts. Another ARC app is the Emergency: Alerts App, which allows users to learn the presence of disasters, locate the closest open shelters, activate a flashlight or strobe

light, and take quizzes on the recommended action steps for 35 types of emergencies. The Emergency: Alerts App monitors conditions wherever the device is located and provides instructions about what to do before, during and after a storm, even if the user has no data connectivity. Storm alerts provide the opportunity for users to prepare their families and homes, to find help, and to let others know they are safe.

“These apps were specifically designed to help keep families safe during severe weather and emergencies,” Jefferson-Hawkins said.

To make it easier for people to get critical safety information and access its services, the ARC expanded its reach with voice technology through Alexa, Amazon’s voice service. By using Alexa-enabled devices, such as Amazon Echo, Echo Dot, Echo Show or Echo Spot, users can enable skills for Alexa to get valuable first aid information, schedule a blood donation, receive notifications about approaching severe weather or make a donation. People can test their first aid knowledge and play the first aid quizzes at “Red Cross Skills for Alexa;” visit <https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/mobile-apps/alexa-skills.html>.

The ARC is funded primarily through private donations of American citizens, board member contributions and corporate partners who provide financial and in-kind services. For more information about the Delmarva Chapter of the American Red cross, visit [www.redcross.org/local/maryland-delaware](http://www.redcross.org/local/maryland-delaware) and read its annual report, or call 302-656-6620. Register for trainings like CPR/AED, first aid and other safety courses at [www.redcross.org/take-a-class](http://www.redcross.org/take-a-class).

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