



Partnering for Relief



The American Red Cross Response to the 2007 Southern California Wildfires



Disaster in a Dry Season



Talia Frenkel/American Red Cross

A Red Cross volunteer surveys the homes destroyed by the Harris Fire in southeastern San Diego County.

October 2007 brought the largest evacuation in California history. Widespread wildfires ravaged a drought-stricken landscape and tragically altered the lives of California residents. Under smoky crimson skies, unrelenting Santa Ana winds fanned raging wildfires throughout Orange, Los Angeles, San Bernardino, San Diego, Riverside and Ventura counties.

As law enforcement sounded evacuation orders, residents abandoned their homes and places of work, taking little with them but the clothes they wore. Patients in hospital gowns were bussed to facilities away from imminent danger. Altogether, 23 wildfires displaced approximately half a million people.

Memories precious to Southern California's communities were reduced to ashes in this disaster. But haunting images remain. The wildfires scorched more than 500,000 acres and destroyed thousands of homes and buildings, according to media reports.

Forging Hope: An Overview of Response

When the wildfires struck, the American Red Cross was among the first to respond. Supporting 40 shelters, the Red Cross provided over 30,000 overnight stays for people while the fires burned. As fires were contained, Red Cross workers in Emergency Response Vehicles (ERVs) circulated within affected areas, distributing meals and snacks, blankets, essential hygiene kits and cleanup supplies to residents and exhausted firefighters. In total, more than 5,300 disaster relief workers—90 percent of them volunteers—provided food, shelter, supplies and other assistance.

Following the emergency phase, the Red Cross met with families and individuals to assess their needs and offer comprehensive resources to help them begin rebuilding their lives. This included medical needs, mental health counseling, family linking services, help with filing insurance claims and guidance for accessing federal assistance and small loans.



William Pitts/American Red Cross

A Red Cross mental health volunteer comforts a woman.

Coping Skills

For 10 days, Victoria Baum, an American Red Cross mental health volunteer, closed her professional practice in Illinois and flew to the West Coast to help hundreds of Californians. Repeating her slogan, "Never surrender," Baum encouraged disaster victims to take the next steps and ask themselves, "What do I need to do now?"

"I am better at my profession because of my work with the Red Cross," said Baum, who seeks to ease intolerable situations by showing she cares. During disasters, she said, "Care is shown by giving someone a tube of lip balm, a bottle of water, a hug or a shoulder to cry on."

Baum recalls seeing a stunned 15-year-old, whose home was spared, stare in disbelief at a neighbor's demolished house. Offering assistance, Baum assessed the teen's needs and directed her family to an organization that could help her recover from survivor's remorse.

Eager to show how much they care, Baum and other Red Cross volunteers assisted those affected by disaster in myriad ways, from helping them formulate plans for their recoveries to educating parents about post-trauma care for their children and offering referrals to mental health professionals, who can help guide them through the recovery process.



Talia Frenkel/American Red Cross

A Red Cross volunteer chats with a young evacuee at the Red Cross shelter in Mira Mesa High School.

Throughout our response, the Red Cross worked alongside partner agencies at the multi-agency assistance centers established by federal, state, county and local governments. We visited clients as they sifted through the devastation, and we established family service centers throughout the area. During the following months, the Red Cross continued to work with community partners to identify resources to ease the long-term recovery of wildfire victims.

Generous Donor Response Bolsters Red Cross Relief Efforts

As the fires burned, the Red Cross responded to countless calls for help, as did thousands of our caring neighbors across the country. Volunteers and donors acted quickly to contribute their time, skills and resources. In one week's time, individuals, corporations and foundations provided support and fully covered the expenses of the Red Cross for this relief operation.

Dozens of donors showed their generosity by sending truckloads of snacks, bottled water, cleanup supplies, hand sanitizer and eye drops. They provided forklifts and pallet jacks to move supplies, and donated fuel cards to support our ERVs, mobile kitchens and other vehicles driven by volunteers. These compassionate donors also supplied bulk food and beverages for

Going the Distance and Paving the Road

Wal-Mart's partnership with the Red Cross spans four decades. When disasters strike in communities across the nation, Wal-Mart takes to the road to help the Red Cross assist those in need.

"At Wal-Mart, we know that our customers count on us to be a good neighbor all year long, and especially during times of disaster," said Margaret McKenna, president of the Wal-Mart Foundation. "Serving those in need lies at the core of Wal-Mart's foundation, and we're proud to partner with the American Red Cross to help our neighbors begin the recovery process."

Wal-Mart sent relief supplies to the city of San Diego for the Red Cross to use in the recovery effort. Going further, Wal-Mart's \$1 million cash leadership gift paved the way for other corporate donors to follow — resulting in increased donations to bolster Red Cross assistance.



Virginia Hart/American Red Cross

A mother and child receive Red Cross assistance.

evacuees who stayed in Red Cross shelters and for residents returning to their damaged homes. In-kind gifts topped the \$2 million mark.

The Red Cross has determined that current contributions and pledges made in response to the Southern California wildfires are sufficient to cover the estimated costs for our relief efforts.

As of December 31, 2007, the estimated total cost of the response to the Southern California wildfires was \$16 million with about \$21 million raised thus far. Based on our continuing response to this disaster, these numbers are subject to change.

Although the emergency phase of the wildfires relief efforts has concluded, the recovery process is ongoing for individuals and families whose homes were destroyed. During the post-emergency phase, some of the issues to be addressed include the challenges of rebuilding, loss of occupations and medical conditions and mental health issues caused by the wildfires. Thanks to our generous donors, the Red Cross can work directly with people and also through partner organizations to help those affected by the wildfires get the assistance they need.

Working together, we are ready and able to respond to those affected by disasters that occur every day in communities across the country.



Talia Frenkel/American Red Cross

The Red Cross works with the Southern Baptist Convention to load meals onto ERVs for distribution to shelter residents, firefighters and others.

Stepping Up to Assist

Every day, the Red Cross relies on the skills and resources of partner organizations that step up and make it possible for us to help those affected by disaster. Immediately, our partners sprang into action, including the Southern Baptist Convention, The Salvation Army and the Church of the Brethren. All who responded allowed the Red Cross to

assist tens of thousands of people affected by the 2007 Southern California wildfires. These partnerships empowered the Red Cross to assist those who needed help most during critical periods of this disaster. Working together, we are ready and able to respond to those affected by disasters that occur every day in communities across the country.



Talia Frenkel/American Red Cross

Red Cross volunteers distribute food to firefighters battling the Malibu fire.

Thank You

Lifting Supplies and Spirits

Through financial donations, in-kind contributions and other support, our partners around the nation allowed us to assist people in need.

Toyota showed its support for those in the hardest-hit areas of the Southern California wildfires by donating over \$2 million for food, shelter and essential aid. In addition, the company donated forklifts to transport relief supplies at warehousing facilities and mobile kitchen sites.

“Toyota believes in the Red Cross and the services it provides,” said Michael Rouse, Corporate Manager of Philanthropy and Community Affairs.

“When disaster strikes, whether it be an incident affecting a single family or a natural disaster affecting thousands, the American Red Cross is there to assist those in need.”

For more than 20 years, Toyota has proudly supported the humanitarian work of the Red Cross. Committed to making the areas they serve better places in which to live, learn and work, Toyota encourages its employees to participate in community projects and activities. For the past decade, the Red Cross has been proud to be a key partner in Toyota’s annual giving campaign. And every year, Toyota employees respond enthusiastically to Red Cross campaigns.

Bolstering Employee Benevolence

Having thousands of employees in Southern California, the Hewlett-Packard Company Foundation responded to this disaster not just because it cares for its workers, but because it cares for people.

Making a significant difference in Red Cross disaster relief efforts, the foundation quickly responded with a \$2 million cash donation and also initiated an employee giving campaign of up to \$3 million, to be provided through a combination of employee donations and matching grants by the foundation. HP, its workforce and its foundation have a long history of supporting those in need, and this response demonstrates their ongoing commitment to helping others.

Testing a New Alliance

The Southern California wildfires also tested a new partnership between the Business Roundtable, a membership organization of 160 chief executives from leading companies, and the Red Cross. The partnership is designed to coordinate the business community’s resources to aid in relief efforts and to create a more comprehensive and effective response to catastrophic disasters.

Thanks to the new alliance, companies received rapid, accurate information on the most critical needs. Within hours, additional provisions were made for transportation and other services that helped expedite the relief effort, such as fuel cards for ERVs and warehouse space for temporary storage of supplies.



Children expressed their appreciation too.

A Special Note of Thanks

“The Red Cross and those affected by the wildfires deeply appreciate your compassionate contributions. They enabled us to assist those in need. Thank you!”

Mary Elcano, Acting President and CEO, General Counsel and Corporate Secretary



William Pitts/American Red Cross

The Disaster Assistance Relief Team and the Red Cross provided relief to weary firefighters on Palomar Mountain in San Diego.

From Food Lines to Fire Lines

The success of Red Cross disaster response is largely dependent on our partnerships with other organizations. For example, the Red Cross was able to set up shelters quickly due to our partnerships with faith-based organizations

and other nonprofits. These organizations provided support from the food lines to the fire lines.

Reprieve for Relief Teams

When weary, ash-covered firefighters sought reprieve from the intense fire lines, they relied on the Disaster

Assistance Relief Team (DART), a group of active and retired firefighters from the New York Fire Department, who are trained in disaster response by the Red Cross.

At 5,000 feet above sea level, 10 DART members set up a relief station for firefighters defending the homes of more than 250 residents on Palomar Mountain. DART member Kevin O'Donnell, RN, helped construct a makeshift triage center supplied by the Red Cross, to treat disaster-related injuries.

"Totally awesome!" said firefighter Don Shoop of Pahrump, Nevada, appreciating the "luxuries" the Red Cross provided for the firefighters: cots; blankets; portable toilets, showers and generators; comfort kits; and the hot meals, snacks and drinks DART served them for nearly two weeks.

Standing ready each day with cold towels, hot meals and camaraderie, DART effectively and efficiently supported fire brigades during this critical period.

Assistance across Borders

Support came not only from across the country but also from across the border.

"There are no boundaries when offering humanitarian assistance," said Isaac Oxenhaut, national response coordinator for the Mexican Red Cross. "When Hurricane Dean affected us in August, the American Red Cross was there to support our relief efforts. When the request came to help the people of Southern California, the Mexican Red Cross was happy to answer the call."

Oxenhaut and nine trained disaster responders contributed their boundless energy and essential skills to the American Red Cross relief efforts.



Julie Scraftford/American Red Cross

American Red Cross and Mexican Red Cross workers help unload a truckload of water.

He and his team reached an estimated 20 communities with large Hispanic populations, assisting nearly 4,000 people in just one week.

In addition to facilitating communication between Red Cross disaster workers and Spanish-speaking residents, this American Red Cross partner delivered meals and relief supplies to areas where needs previously went unmet.

The strength of our partnership with the Mexican Red Cross was further proven when, just weeks later, floods ravaged southern Mexico and the American Red Cross provided humanitarian support and financial assistance.

Reaching Diverse Communities

To reach California's many diverse, sometimes non-English-speaking residents, the Red Cross relied on partnerships with many representative community groups in San Diego and San Bernardino.

Community leaders from 20 organizations representing minority, immigrant and disability communities were consulted extensively to great benefit. Coordination with the national offices and local affiliates of the National Council of La Raza, for instance, increased awareness of Red Cross services. In turn, we learned more about the specific needs of Spanish-speaking residents affected by this disaster. And, working with tribal councils in Southern California made it possible to open additional shelters and meet the immediate needs of Native Americans affected by the fires.

Collaboration with such diverse groups is pivotal to successful disaster response.



Evacuees are greeted by Mexican Red Cross volunteers at a service center in Ramona, California.

Talia Frenkel/American Red Cross



A Red Cross volunteer delivers a hot meal to a Santa Ysabel member.

William Pitts/American Red Cross

Thanks to these valuable partnerships, more people received more assistance. The Red Cross is grateful to all our partners, who helped deliver essential services to those affected by the wildfires.

For more information and stories on how your gift is making a difference, please visit www.redcross.org.

The Disaster Relief Fund

Enabling Swift Response

Whenever and wherever there are disaster-caused needs, our country relies upon the American Red Cross to provide relief. To respond to more than 70,000 disasters across the country each year, the Red Cross must have people, materials and financial resources ready to go. Just as we encourage individuals and families to be prepared for the unexpected, we also ask that they invest in the readiness of our communities by donating to the American Red Cross Disaster Relief Fund. Donations to the Disaster Relief Fund and to affected chapters made it possible for the Red Cross to respond quickly and successfully to the Southern California wildfires.

The Disaster Relief Fund is the conduit through which caring people can offer immediate assistance to those who are affected by natural or human-caused disasters. This fund enables the Red Cross to provide rapid relief to disaster victims—from food, shelter and clothing, to physical and mental health services—regardless of the type, size or location of the disaster.



Red Cross volunteers hand out cleanup kits and other supplies to evacuees returning home.

Talia Frenkel/American Red Cross



Little evacuees greet a nurse at a Red Cross shelter in Saugus, California.

Talia Frenkel/American Red Cross

The Red Cross has determined that current contributions and pledges made in response to the Southern California wildfires are sufficient to cover the estimated costs for our relief efforts. But there is always a great need for donations to the Disaster Relief Fund.

Thank you for giving to the American Red Cross Disaster Relief Fund and to your local chapter. Just as families and communities rely on the Red Cross, the Red Cross needs your help to continue to help others.

Cover photos: *Top*, Firefighters from the Carlsbad Fire Brigade battle the flames near Escondido, California. *Talia Frenkel/American Red Cross*
Bottom, A young evacuee stands in line for dinner at a Red Cross shelter in Spring Valley, California. *Hector Emanuel/American Red Cross*

