



**American  
Red Cross**

# California Wildfires of 2017

One-Year Update | October 2018



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“We are safe here,” Nazriet said.

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When deadly wildfires repeatedly ravaged communities across California, more than **4,400 American Red Cross disaster workers** from across the U.S.—90 percent of them volunteers—mounted swift responses to help thousands of people in need.

They provided shelter, relief and comfort for residents like Nazriet and her family of five, who fled their Santa Rosa home at 3 a.m. as a wildfire threatened, taking with them only the clothes on their backs.

Cover: Michele and John Ward raised three sons in the Skyline neighborhood of Ventura, California. Though their home was destroyed by the Thomas Fire, they are determined to rebuild. Photo by Dermot Tatlow/American Red Cross. Above: Photo by Marko Kocic/American Red Cross.

## A Message from Harvey Johnson, Senior Vice President, Disaster Cycle Services

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The 2017 California wildfire season was exhausting and heartbreaking for affected residents. For months on end, relentless blazes—including some of the largest and most destructive wildfires ever seen in California—impacted communities across the state, causing tragic losses and forever changing lives.

Amid an unprecedented season of major disasters, the American Red Cross delivered relief and comfort to thousands of Californians. This vital aid was made possible through the extraordinary generosity of the public and the tireless efforts of thousands of Red Cross volunteers and employees. Together, their compassionate contributions provided safe shelter, food, water and essential relief supplies to people in need, along with health services, emotional support and much more.

As wildfire survivors sifted through the ashes of ruined homes and took the first steps to rebuild their lives, the Red Cross has stayed by their sides with ongoing support for recovery. We're providing financial assistance to households whose homes experienced major damage or were destroyed, and we're awarding grants to partners doing important community recovery work. We're also joining with local Long-Term Recovery Committees to help identify and address residents' unmet needs.

We know that the road to recovery can be long and difficult. But, powered by steadfast supporters and dedicated volunteers, we'll be there with affected individuals and families every step of the way.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Harvey Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Harvey Johnson



Thick smokes chokes out the sun as disaster volunteer Vicki Eichstaedt walks near burned-out areas of the Los Padres National Forest. Photo by Dermot Tatlow/American Red Cross

## Response Brings Relief and Comfort to Thousands of People Across California

In 2017, historic wildfires consumed more than 500,000 acres across California. As rapidly spreading blazes forced mandatory evacuations and inflicted catastrophic damage again and again, the American Red Cross worked around the clock to help residents coping with heartbreaking losses and the stress of displacement from their homes.

October's wildfires took a tragic toll in the city of Santa Rosa and other Northern California communities, with more than 40 lives lost and thousands of homes damaged or destroyed. The Tubbs Fire—one of a dozen major fires that broke out across eight counties—was by some measures the most destructive in California history. Over 90,000 people in Northern California evacuated just ahead of fast-moving fires that devoured homes and entire neighborhoods.

Another swarm of wildfires ignited in December, this time in Southern California. The Thomas Fire consumed more than 281,000 acres and became at the time the largest wildfire in California history, until it was eclipsed by the Mendocino Complex Fire in 2018. These wildfires took two lives, forced more than 230,000 people from their homes and caused widespread damage throughout the densely populated region—particularly in hard-hit Ventura County.

What's more, subsequent heavy rains unleashed massive debris flows from scorched hillsides, compounding the destruction in Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties. Deadly rivers of mud, boulders and other debris caused 21 confirmed fatalities, mostly in the Montecito area, and destroyed over 100 homes.

As these extraordinary and tragic disasters ravaged California communities, Red Cross volunteers and employees—many of them from nearby communities and local Red Cross chapters—joined with our partners to deliver sorely needed aid when it was needed most.



Top: A Red Cross volunteer spends some time with Charles, who took refuge at the Sonoma Fairgrounds shelter. Photo by Marko Kocic/American Red Cross. Bottom: Santa Rosa resident Gabino Gonzalez gets hot lunches for his family from a Red Cross volunteer. Photo by Marko Kocic/American Red Cross



More than **39,300** overnight shelter stays provided with partners



More than **278,600** meals and snacks served with partners



Top: A Red Cross volunteer provides filter masks to help protect Ventura County residents from wildfire smoke. Photo by Dermot Tatlow/American Red Cross. Bottom: Volunteer Maddy Thoresen checks on Glen Leotta, 93, and her dog, Sally, at the Sonoma Fairgrounds shelter. Photo by Marko Kovic/American Red Cross

## Shelter

Hundreds of thousands of people left their homes as wildfires threatened. Many fled quickly, with little more than what they could throw in the car. The Red Cross worked closely with government and community partners to open and staff shelters, ensuring that displaced residents could find safe refuge, warm meals and a place to lay their heads.

From setting up cots and blankets to serving nourishing meals, selfless Red Cross volunteers worked 24-7 to make displaced families as comfortable as possible in extremely difficult circumstances.

## Food

Simple comforts like hot meals meant so much to people taking refuge in shelters, wondering if their homes would still be there when they returned. And when fire-ravaged communities were safe to visit, Red Cross workers in emergency response vehicles visited with food, water, ice and more—providing sustenance and support for residents coping with the stressful aftermath and an uncertain future.

## Relief Items

Many evacuees had no time to gather daily essentials like toothpaste, soap, diapers and shampoo. To help with these everyday needs, the Red Cross provided comfort kits containing basic personal items. We also distributed supplies like rakes, gloves and shovels for cleanup, as well as special filter masks to make breathing easier in smoky air and sifter boxes to help people search the ashes of their homes for jewelry and other cherished belongings.

## Health Services and Emotional Support

In times of disaster, a sympathetic ear and warm hug can mean as much as a hot meal or place to sleep. Along with tangible support such as food, shelter and relief items, trained Red Cross disaster workers offered wildfire survivors sorely needed comfort and emotional support. They also provided basic health services and helped people replace prescription medications and lost eyeglasses.



More than **202,000**  
**relief items** distributed



More than **26,700** health and  
**mental health contacts** made\*

\*All numbers are cumulative and reflect Red Cross response efforts since October 9, 2017

## Providing Ongoing Support for Recovery

The American Red Cross, with our deep roots in the affected communities and national network of volunteers and supporters, provided swift relief for Californians as they faced frightening evacuations and devastating losses. One year later, we continue to stand with wildfire survivors, providing ongoing recovery assistance as they pick up the pieces and rebuild their lives.

Recovering from disasters of this magnitude can be a challenging and time-consuming process. Since the fires, the Red Cross has worked alongside a wide range of partners, including government agencies, non-profit groups, faith-based organizations, area businesses and others, to coordinate relief and recovery efforts for people with unmet needs.

As people began to recover, trained case workers met with impacted individuals and families, giving them a chance to share their most urgent needs and ask questions. They helped affected residents create individual recovery plans and locate available services and resources to get back on their feet.

In some situations, the Red Cross provided financial support for needs like apartment deposits, clothes and food, or to cover immediate transportation expenses. Today, we are also using donated dollars to provide additional financial assistance to households that need extra help and to provide grants for community-based recovery services.

### Financial Assistance for Households

The Red Cross is providing financial assistance for severely impacted California households in need of recovery support and whose homes experienced major damage or were destroyed by the 2017 wildfires or debris flow.

As of October 8, the Red Cross has already provided \$1,500 each to more than 3,000 households, and we continue to work with more residents every day. This assistance is helping individuals and families pay for temporary housing, make essential repairs to damaged homes, replace lost appliances and furniture and much more. We met with a few of the thousands of people receiving long-term recovery assistance, and we are grateful to them for sharing their stories.



Candace and Rick Hall join their four grandchildren at the site where their home used to stand before the 2017 wildfires. They've received financial assistance from the Red Cross to help support their recovery. Photo by Daniel Cima/American Red Cross

### Candace and Rick Hall, Santa Rosa

Candace and Rick Hall were asleep in their Santa Rosa home when they were awakened by loudspeakers. A sheriff's car was traveling through their neighborhood warning residents to evacuate.

"I really didn't think the house was going to burn down," Candace said. But Rick stepped outside and saw that "the sky was orange, like a sunrise." Candace and Rick traveled to their son's house nearby to alert his family, including their four grandchildren, and make sure they got out safely. About 20 minutes after they left their son's house, they looked back and could see the flames over the ridge. Their neighborhood was in flames.

Both their home and their son's home were destroyed in the fire. Rick's first experience with the Red Cross was at the evacuation center, where he met with a caseworker. He received immediate help replacing lost medications and financial assistance that the couple put into a "car fund" to replace a van that had been destroyed in the fire, so they could transport their grandchildren.

It wasn't the last time they'd encounter Red Cross volunteers. "They were everywhere," Candace said. "They had food and gloves and shovels and rakes and sifters...things we needed. We didn't have to take the time to figure out where to get them."

The Halls have since received an additional \$1,500 in recovery financial assistance from the Red Cross, which they are applying to the cost of rebuilding. Throughout their ordeal, Candace was impressed by the Red Cross disaster workers she met. "They were very kind and sympathetic and helpful," she said. "They wanted to make sure we got everything we needed."

### **Mattias Purcell and family, Ventura**

Mattias and his wife were both out of town for work when the Thomas Fire threatened their home. His wife's parents were staying there, taking care of the couple's 4-month-old daughter, Sofia. A neighbor called Matias, explaining that the fire was approaching and his family should leave. His in-laws fled with Sofia and checked into a hotel, taking only what they could quickly pack.

Matias' neighborhood was wiped out. His wife's car was burned, along with almost everything they owned. "The whole city looked like a nuclear bomb had been dropped," he said. "We were basically left with nothing."

To make matters worse, Matias learned that his renter's insurance had expired, and he had to turn to his savings to get back on his feet. He learned that the Red Cross was helping wildfire survivors and drove to the Red Cross office in Camarillo, where he met with a caseworker.

"She was great," he said. "We went through the process of registering for financial assistance. Everything went so smoothly."

Matias and his family spent Christmas in their native Chile, and have since returned to California. He is grateful for the \$1,500 they've received from the Red Cross. "You never know when you're going to be in a situation like this," he said. "I never dreamed that I would lose a house, a neighborhood, in a fire. Funds like this make a world of difference, not only for the adults but also for the kids involved."

### **Martha Menth, Santa Rosa**

Martha Menth's wildfire story begins with a harrowing escape from the October 2017 wildfires, which

destroyed the new hillside home she and her late husband had moved into just three years before.

The night the fire broke out, she recalled, there was a ferocious sound of pummeling on the deck outside. As it continued, Menth opened the front door. "The smoke was horrific and there were embers in the air," she said.

The next minutes were frantic. She got her husband dressed and into his wheelchair, then grabbed their two cats and put them in carriers. All the time, she said, they heard constant explosions outside as the fire grew. The power flickered on and off.

As they headed out of the area, they saw neighbors "just flying down the hill," also trying to get out alive. They joined the manic caravan, at points driving directly through flames for about half a mile. "We were surrounded by fire," she said.

In the days, weeks and months that followed, Martha and her husband tried to piece their lives back together. The Red Cross was crucial, she said. Her niece, whose car had melted in the fire, was the first to contact the Red Cross, and she suggested that Martha do the same.



Tubbs Fire survivor Martha Menth shares her wildfire story with a Red Cross worker. Martha received financial assistance and other support from the Red Cross after the disaster. Photo by Daniel Cima/ American Red Cross

“They had tents, food and cases of water. They were like a well-oiled machine,” she recalled. The Red Cross helped replace medical equipment lost in the fire, and provided financial assistance that covered money for gas and clothing, expanding their wardrobe beyond the clothes they were wearing during the escape. “We could actually make plans,” Martha said.

Tragically, Martha’s husband, whose fragile medical condition was exacerbated by the trauma of the wildfire, passed away in the year since the fire struck. Through the ups and downs of recovery and heartbreak, the Red Cross has continued to follow up to see what else she might need. “They keep checking in,” she said. “They ask, ‘Do you need anything? Is there anything we can do?’”

## Community Grants

Along with recovery financial assistance for households, the Red Cross has prioritized \$3 million to support community-based recovery efforts in California. We have begun accepting grant applications from partner non-profit organizations with a strong track record of providing recovery services.

This includes organizations able to provide home repair and rebuilding services, and others that provide behavioral health services across the affected counties, with a focus on the needs of children and youth.

In addition, the Red Cross may help to fund other recovery services such as Long-Term Recovery Committees, financial counseling, and programs that assist people with disabilities, the elderly and underserved communities.



Red Cross volunteers were touched by the spirit of Santa Rosa resident Brian Lackey as they delivered supplies to his devastated neighborhood after the October fires. Photo by Marko Kocic/American Red Cross

## Compassionate Donors Fund Relief and Recovery for Wildfire Survivors

None of our response or recovery assistance would be possible without the extraordinary support of our donors. The Red Cross has raised \$29.3 million, including the value of critical donated goods and services, to help people affected by the 2017 California Wildfires. As of October 8, 2018, the Red Cross had already programmed approximately \$18.9 million on

emergency relief and recovery efforts for the 2017 California Wildfires. The remaining funds will be used to help with unmet needs for individuals and families impacted by the 2017 wildfires, as well as to expand longer-term community-based recovery services in the affected areas.



*Thank you!*

The Red Cross must be ready for every disaster, big or small, and we respond to an average of nearly 64,000 disasters per year—including single-family or apartment home fires, severe weather, floods and wildfires. Those in need turn to the Red Cross in their darkest hours because they know they can depend on us right after the disaster and through their recovery. Your donation helps us fulfill this promise. We are grateful for your trust.

**2017 California Wildfires (Northern California) Expenses and Commitments (in millions)<sup>1</sup>**

As of October 8, 2018

Expense Categories	Food, Shelter and Relief Items	Health and Emotional Support	Immediate Financial Assistance	Individual and Community Recovery	Total	Expense %
Financial assistance, food and other relief items	\$1.9	\$0.3	\$2.3	\$3.9	\$8.4	59.2%
Deployment and maintenance of volunteers and staff (includes airfare, lodging, meals and vehicles)	\$1.7	\$0.4	\$0.2	–	\$2.3	16.2%
Freight, postage and warehousing	\$0.9	–	–	–	\$0.9	6.3%
Full-time Red Cross employees	\$0.3	–	\$0.1	–	\$0.4	2.8%
Equipment, maintenance and fueling of Red Cross emergency vehicles and rented trucks	\$0.3	–	–	–	\$0.3	2.1%
Temporary disaster employees and long-term recovery hires	–	–	–	\$0.2	\$0.2	1.4%
Kitchen, shelter and other logistics that enable service delivery	\$0.2	–	–	–	\$0.2	1.4%
IT, communications and call centers	\$0.2	–	–	–	\$0.2	1.4%
<b>Total Program Expenses</b>	<b>\$5.5</b>	<b>\$0.7</b>	<b>\$2.6</b>	<b>\$4.1</b>	<b>\$12.9</b>	<b>91%</b>
Management, general and fundraising <sup>2</sup>					\$1.3	9%
<b>Total Expenses</b>					<b>\$14.2</b>	<b>100%</b>

<sup>1</sup>Dollar figures in all tables are rounded to the nearest \$100K; therefore, expenses \$49,999 and below are represented as zero.

<sup>2</sup>Management, general and fundraising expenses support our work at its core and are indispensable to running the organization and helping people in need. They include the people and systems to maintain our enterprise-wide computer and telecommunications, HR and payroll systems to support our more than 20,000 employees and approximately 300,000 volunteers, fundraising and communications functions, and other support services across all program lines. 91 cents of every dollar received for the 2017 California Wildfires will be spent on our services to people affected by the 2017 California Wildfires.

**2017 California Wildfires and Debris Flows (Southern California)  
Expenses and Commitments (in millions)**

As of October 8, 2018

Expense Categories	Food, Shelter and Relief Items	Health and Emotional Support	Immediate Financial Assistance	Individual and Community Recovery	Total	Expense %
Financial assistance, food and other relief items	\$0.5	\$0.1	\$0.6	\$0.9	\$2.1	44.7%
Deployment and maintenance of volunteers and staff (includes airfare, lodging, meals and vehicles)	\$0.8	\$0.3	\$0.1	–	\$1.2	25.5%
Freight, postage and warehousing	\$0.5	–	–	–	\$0.5	10.6%
Full-time Red Cross employees	\$0.1	–	\$0.1	–	\$0.2	4.3%
IT, communications and call centers	\$0.1	–	–	–	\$0.1	2.1%
Equipment, maintenance and fueling of Red Cross emergency vehicles and rented trucks	\$0.1	–	–	–	\$0.1	2.1%
Kitchen, shelter and other logistics that enable service delivery	\$0.1	–	–	–	\$0.1	2.1%
Temporary disaster employees and long-term recovery hires	–	–	–	–	–	0.0%
<b>Total Program Expenses</b>	<b>\$2.2</b>	<b>\$0.4</b>	<b>\$0.8</b>	<b>\$0.9</b>	<b>\$4.3</b>	<b>91%</b>
Management, general and fundraising					\$0.4	9%
<b>Total Expenses</b>					<b>\$4.7</b>	<b>100%</b>

**2017 California Wildfires and Debris Flows (Total)**

\$29.3 raised (in millions) as of October 8, 2018

Expense Categories	Total
Total Program Expenses	\$17.2
Management, general and fundraising	\$1.7
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$18.9</b>
Program Dollars Remaining	\$9.5
Management, general and fundraising remaining to be applied	\$0.9
<b>Total Budget</b>	<b>\$29.3</b>



# You Helped People in their Darkest Hours

The extraordinary generosity of the public helped thousands in need after the 2017 California Wildfires.



**American Red Cross**



To learn more about Red Cross response and recovery efforts to help 2017 California Wildfires survivors, visit [redcross.org/californiawildfires2017](https://redcross.org/californiawildfires2017).



**American  
Red Cross**

#### **Mission**

The American Red Cross prevents and alleviates human suffering in the face of emergencies by mobilizing the power of volunteers and the generosity of donors.