



### F23 The Role of the American Red Cross in Mass Disasters

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The goal of this presentation is to acquaint the forensic scientist with the responsibilities and activities of the American Red Cross in Mass Disaster Relief Operations. This presentation will demonstrate the interrelationships between the American Red Cross and other entities responding to the aftermath of Mass Disasters, both man-made and natural.

The Mission Statement: "The American Red Cross, a humanitarian organization led by volunteers and guided by its Congressional Charter and the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross Movement, will provide relief to victims of disasters and help people prevent, prepare for, and respond to emergencies".

Chartered by the U.S. Congress in 1905, the American National Red Cross is the lead organization to carry out the United States treaty obligations of the Geneva Conventions. The "American Amendment" to the 1864 Geneva Convention, applied the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross Movement in armed conflict and chartered the American Red Cross to "carry on a system of national and international relief in time of peace and to apply the same in mitigating the sufferings caused by pestilence, famine, fire, floods, and other great national calamities, and to devise and carry on measures for preventing the same."-U.S. Congress, act of January 5, 1905, as amended, 36 U.S.C.

In our modern world, terrorism has brought new meaning to the word 'calamities'.

Aviation Disasters: The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) was directed by the U.S. Congress via the *Aviation Disaster Family Assistance Act of 1996* and the *Foreign Air Carrier Family Support Act of 1997* to meet the needs of aviation disaster victims and their families. In 1998, the NTSB signed a Statement of Understanding with the American Red Cross to designate it to coordinate the emergency care and support of families of passengers and crew involved in commercial airline disasters under the guidance of the NTSB. In the Statement, the American Red Cross agreed to:

1. Provide mental health services
2. Provide an environment in which families may grieve in private.
3. Meet with the families who have traveled to the accident location, contact the families unable to travel, and contact all affected families periodically thereafter.
4. Communicate with the families of passengers and crew as to the roles of agencies in the activities involving the accident and post-accident.
5. Arrange suitable memorial services in consultation with the families, NTSB, air carrier and local officials.
6. Provide liaisons with the air carrier to track the status of injured passengers and crew.
7. Participate in drills, exercises and training activities to enable successful execution of assigned responsibilities.

Particular relevance to the forensic community is that information required in the identification of deceased passengers and crew is relayed via the Family Assistance Centers coordinated by the American Red Cross.

In order to carry out its mission in aviation disaster, the American Red Cross maintains "Critical Response Aviation Teams" on standby for deployment within four hours of being activated.

Disaster Relief Operations: Other types of disasters, whether they are natural or man-made, include fires, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, ice storms, chemical spills, S.W.A.T. actions, W.M.D., earthquakes, transportation wrecks, explosions, tsunamis and acts of terrorism. The American Red Cross is capable of organizing a disaster relief operation that is the size of a 'Fortune 500' company within 24 hours. Emergency relief is intended to provide the basic human needs of food, shelter, clothing, medication or crisis counseling. Tens of thousands of volunteers are trained to respond to disasters both small and large. When a 'Call-Down' for volunteers is engaged, they are put on stand-by to travel within 24 hours for major disasters.

Services provided on Disaster Relief Operations include:

1. Mass Sheltering
2. Mass Feeding
3. Canteening (food and hydration) for First Responders-such as Fire and Police
4. Crisis Counseling/Mental Health Services
5. Health Services (adjunctive to sheltering activity)
6. Spiritual Care Services
7. Liaisons to Government agencies, Community groups, Labor unions and other Voluntary agencies
8. Individual Family Assistance
9. Disaster Welfare Inquiry (communications)
10. Public Affairs

In summary, mass disasters not only have the potential to cause mass casualties, but will impact many more people. Whether they are direct victims of the disaster, or family and friends concerned about the victims' welfare, the American Red Cross provides humanitarian relief.

#### **Mass Disaster, American Red Cross, Disaster Relief Operations**