



Shelter Overview for Facility Owners in Our Community

The American Red Cross – Dallas Area Chapter operates “emergency mass care congregate shelters” in collaboration with shelter facility owners and local Emergency Management Coordinators. These words have very specific meanings and can help understand how the Dallas Red Cross operates these shelters. “Emergency” means these shelters are temporary. They only open in times of emergency, such as large fires and tornados, and are not open year-round. Emergency shelters are closed when all of the shelter residents have found suitable housing. “Mass Care” is defined as an operation that meets the needs of the community as a whole, as opposed to individual assistance. In a “congregate” shelter, clients all sleep in one large room on cots. Clients in congregate shelters are not separated into groups, such as by gender or family. “Shelters”, defined by the Red Cross, meets the base humanitarian needs of our clients according to the fundamental principles of the International Red Cross Movement.

1. Shelter Facility Survey

The first step in collaboration with facility owners and the Dallas Red Cross is a shelter survey. Using form “ARC 6564D”, this survey will document the size of the building, number and size of rooms, normal purpose of that room during the normal course of operation of the facility, type and quantity of equipment in each room, and accessibility of the rooms and equipment to the American Red Cross during use as an emergency shelter. Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act is a strong focus of this survey, including door widths and wheelchair ramps. Our chapter will provide a copy of the survey to the facility owner upon completion.

2. Mass Care Shelter Agreement

In order for a facility to be used by the American Red Cross as an emergency shelter site, there must be an agreement between the facility owner and the American Red Cross, called a Mass Care Shelter Agreement. This document is simply a plain language agreement outlining the collaboration between the Dallas Red Cross and the facility owner, working together with local Emergency Management coordinators, to provide temporary assistance to those affected by disasters in the spirit of community. This is not a legal contract, and the facility owner does not give up any rights by signing this agreement. Any questions regarding this agreement can be answered by the Dallas Red

Cross Emergency Planning Department. Once the agreement and survey are completed, a copy of each document will be sent by the Dallas Red Cross to the Emergency Management Coordinator within the facility's jurisdiction (such as the City of Dallas Office of Emergency Management for any facilities within Dallas city limits). The Dallas Red Cross cooperates fully with all Emergency Management departments in our 12-county chapter service area.

At this point, either the Dallas Red Cross or local Emergency Management officials can request that the facility owner open their building as an emergency mass care congregate shelter.

3. Disaster Shelter Selection

When an emergency occurs and the need for a shelter arises, a site (or multiple sites) is selected based on its safe proximity to the affected area, number of evacuees it can accommodate, and availability of the facility for the duration of the shelter operation. If a facility is not directly affected by the disaster, and does not have any irrevocable commitments, it will be considered for use.

4. Request to Open Facility

When a facility is considered suitable to serve as an emergency shelter for a particular emergency, the facility owner will receive a **request** to open their facility in coordination with the Dallas Red Cross and the local Emergency Management department. Non-government facility owners **always** have the option of saying "no" to this request, for any reason. If a facility owner agrees to open as a shelter, they must agree to give 24 hours notice to clients, shelter operations and local Emergency Management before closing the shelter. Suitable housing (which could include a combination of hotel rooms, a different shelter or returning to home) must be found for all clients before a shelter can close.

5. Contact Authorized Personnel

Once authorization is obtained, anyone who is on the contact list to open the facility may meet a representative of the American Red Cross at the location to unlock the building, and may remain on site as a representative of the facility if they choose, but this is not required by the American Red Cross. Typically this is a facility or operations manager, principal, maintenance head, or other designated employee.

6. Pre-Open Shelter Facility Inspection

Once a representative from the facility opens the building, an inspection of the facility just prior to opening is required (ARC 6506). This is to determine that the facility does currently meet safety requirements, and to document the current condition of walls, floors, equipment, grounds, and accessibility. This document will be referenced in a walkthrough after the facility is closed. Once this is completed, then the shelter will be open for operation.

The American Red Cross does not provide as supplies for shelter operations common restroom supplies such as toilet paper, hand soap, or paper towels, and greatly appreciates the use of these supplies, usually provided by the facility owners/operators.

7. Shelter Operations

American Red Cross shelters are staffed and operated 24 hours a day. While a shelter location is open, a facility contact person will need to be available in the event any problems arise with the building, such as heating/cooling system failure, plumbing or electrical problems, or problems with the kitchen equipment. Again, it is not required by the American Red Cross that they remain on the site, but they are certainly welcome to do so throughout the duration of the operation.

The Dallas Red Cross can provide a wealth of information concerning shelter operations.

8. Closing the Shelter

After all clients have found suitable housing (another shelter, hotel room, etc) and the shelter is closed, an exit inspection and Release of Facility (ARC 6556) is completed. This is to document any damage to the facility that may have occurred while the American Red Cross was there, list any missing items noticed by the facility staff, and to turn the operation of the facility back over to the governing board or owner. Also, please refer to the shelter agreement concerning reimbursement procedures for utilities incurred during shelter operations.

This document, as with the shelter agreement and shelter survey, is meant to walk a facility owner through the steps to become an emergency mass care congregate shelter that is operated by the Dallas Red Cross. As with the shelter agreement and shelter survey, this was written to be as straightforward and open as possible, using plain language, in collaboration with our partners. All of our work is done in the spirit of community as we come together to help those in desperate need of assistance in times of disaster. Thank you for helping our community prevent, prepare and respond to emergencies.
