

Red Cross Joining Determined North Dakota Residents in Battle Against Mother Nature

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Bismark, North Dakota - With the residents of North Dakota facing a double whammy of snow and flooding, the American Red Cross is also working furiously to place workers, food, and sheltering supplies across the state to support the fight against flood waters and keep people safe from heavy snow fall.

Sandbaggers gather by the hundreds at the Fargo Dome. Local officials say the goal is to fill nearly two million bags. Photo by Claire Sale/American Red Cross.

Shelters are already open in Bismarck to care for people evacuated from their homes in the midst of a blizzard — their homes threatened by flood waters from ice jammed rivers. That same storm is producing snow that may actually slow the progression of flood waters on the Red River in Fargo. There, local volunteers are taking no chances. "This time it came so fast," said Fargo resident Viki Zimmerman, "Last time [1997 flooding] we had three weeks. It's pretty nerve racking. The enormous community effort is amazing to see."

Fargo residents are determined to win their fight against the river. Kit O'Neill has been a Red Cross Mental Health volunteer since 1993 and has helped the Fargo community cope with several major floods. O'Neill commented, "The resilience of the community, the vast outpouring of support for the flood-fighting effort, the knowledge of facing difficult floods successfully in the past, they all contribute to an overall feeling of hopefulness and strength. We can't control the weather or where the water goes, but we can control how we respond."

The Red Cross is working a double play, combining the strength of its local chapters and American Red Cross national headquarters. The organization is preparing for what could be a long disaster relief operation if the snow delays the river crest and water levels stay high for an extended time.

"It's important that we beat the clock in getting supplies into Fargo," said Joe Becker, senior vice president of disaster services for the Red Cross "But what we place in the state may need to stay there for days and days."

More than 300 Red Cross workers are already on the scene and 12 volunteer teams will arrive today to operate shelters. Emergency Response Vehicles are providing meals to sandbagging volunteers and more trucks are on the way. More than 50,000 ready-to-eat meals are already on site, as well as cots and blankets. The Red Cross is coordinating all of these efforts with the governor's office, as well as state and local emergency managers.

Help people affected by disasters like the recent flooding and winter storms, by donating to the American Red Cross Disaster Relief Fund. On those rare occasions when donations exceed Red Cross expenses for a specific disaster, contributions are used to prepare for and serve victims of other disasters. Your gift enables the Red Cross to provide shelter, food, counseling and other assistance to victims of all disasters. Call 1-800-RED-CROSS (1-800-733-2767) or 1-800-257-7575 (Spanish). Contributions to the Disaster Relief Fund may be sent to your local American Red Cross chapter or to the American Red Cross, P. O. Box 37243, Washington, DC 20013. Internet users can make a secure online contribution by visiting www.redcross.org.

About the American Red Cross:

The American Red Cross shelters, feeds and counsels victims of disasters; provides nearly half of the nation's blood

supply; teaches lifesaving skills; and supports military members and their families. The Red Cross is a charitable organization - not a government agency - and depends on volunteers and the generosity of the American public to perform its humanitarian mission. For more information, please visit www.redcross.org or join our blog at www.redcrosschat.org.