

How You Can Help in a Disaster

Do You Want to Volunteer for a Disaster?

We cannot predict the timing or nature of our community's next disaster, but we know that volunteer assistance will be needed to respond to it. You--either alone or with your family, your neighbors, or your work group--can be part of your community's rebuilding efforts.

There are three ways that you can volunteer immediately following a disaster:

- In your "first circle" or the half-mile radius around your home;
- In an official disaster response role, which requires advance training and affiliation with a disaster response agency, or
- As a community volunteer in one of a wide variety of tasks and locations

First Circle Volunteers: In the first 72 hours after a disaster, you and your neighbors will have to depend on one another. What's the "first circle" around your home? How could you help? Needs may include health care, debris removal, gathering and organizing supplies, general organizing, calming and reassurance, and child care.

Trained Affiliated Volunteers: Long before a disaster strikes, these volunteers know where to report and what their responsibilities will be. Men and women of all ages and backgrounds work together in challenging situations--handling radio communications, opening shelters, receiving and distributing food, handling chain saws and other tools, and running errands.

Community Volunteers: Untrained volunteers will be needed by a wide variety of agencies that are involved in relief operations. Needs may include shelter staffing, debris cleanup, warehousing of food and supplies, staffing of temporary offices, and assisting the elderly and people with disabilities. People with language skills are often in demand as community volunteers.

Contact Your Local Volunteer Center: Locate the nearest Volunteer Center by going to Points of Light Foundation & Volunteer Center National Network www.pointsoflight.org.

(Summary of article "Volunteering in a Disaster" by Tina Cheplick which appeared in an advertising supplement to the Marin Independent Journal, Week of October 7, 1996)

Where to Volunteer

Many agencies and organizations are involved in disaster response and relief. Here are some examples in the San Francisco Bay Area:

[American Red Cross Bay Area Volunteer Centers of the Bay Area](#)

[State and National Links](#)

[American Red Cross](#)

[Governor's Office of Emergency Services, State of California](#)

[National Network of Volunteers Centers](#)

[The Salvation Army](#)

[America's Second Harvest Food Banks](#)

The best place to start your search is your local Volunteer Center, where staff will collect the latest information on community needs and help point you in the right direction. Be prepared to tell the Volunteer Center the following information:

- Your name, address and contact info
- Your skills, including languages spoken
- When you are available--days of week, time of day, and for how long
- Any preferences or limitations you may have