



**American  
Red Cross**

Cape Cod and Islands Chapter

# **HURRICANES AND LOCAL EMERGENCIES: 2009 guide for the media**



People, pets, sheltering and caring for each other in the case of an emergency

**American Red Cross  
Cape Cod and Islands Chapter  
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Media contact, 24 Hours:  
508-775-1540, press 3**

**This Media Alert was put together by the American Red Cross, Cape Cod and Islands Chapter in collaboration with and input from the Cape Cod Disaster Animal Response Team and the Barnstable County Emergency Management Team**

## The Role of the American Red Cross, Cape Cod and Islands Chapter, in Disasters and in the Regional Sheltering Plan in particular

Within its jurisdiction of Barnstable, Dukes and Nantucket counties, The Cape Cod and Islands Chapter helps people prevent, prepare for and respond to emergencies. We respond to three to four disasters each month, mostly house fires. When larger disasters occur, Red Cross provides the same services on a larger scale: emergency food, clothing, shelter, mental health support and, sometimes, first aid. Though mandated to provide service by the U.S. Congress, the Red Cross receives no government funds.

The American Red Cross, Cape Cod and Islands Chapter is one of the major players during the operation of the Regional Sheltering Plan on Cape Cod . Responsible for Coordination and Planning is the Barnstable County Regional Emergency Planning Committee (BCREPC). The Incident Management Team (IMT) is responsible for the planning and command and responsible for managing the regional sheltering plan.

Other agencies participating in the Regional Sheltering Plan include Public Safety officials (Fire and Police), Cape Cod Medical Reserve Corps (MRC), Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) , the Barnstable County Sheriff's Department and the Disaster Animal Response Team (DART). Assistance for the disabled has been supported by Cape Organization for Rights of the Disabled (CORD) - assisting those with special needs in the sheltering process.

A key element of the full-service shelter includes being able to provide shelter for pets, organized by the Cape Cod Disaster Animal Response Team (CCDART). Experience in past emergencies is that some residents have been reluctant to leave for shelters because they don't want to leave their pets. Currently three out of the six regional shelters can accommodate pets but the plan calls for all six shelters to have this capability.

Another key element includes transportation to the Regional Shelters. Agreements with First Student Bus and the Regional Transit Authority will assist and support the plan.

Finally, Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) supports communications by organizing communications processes within shelters as well as establishing communications to the outside world should cell phones and other forms of communications become inoperable.

During past national and regional disasters, the Red Cross, BCREPC and other agencies have learned it is more efficient and effective to manage full-service regional shelters rather than multiple small shelters for small numbers of people optimizing the most efficient use of human and material resources. The six regional shelters can currently handle 3,000 people, or 500 per shelter. When fully resourced, the combined capacity will be 6,000, or 1,000 per shelter. Additionally as a result of the Cape Cod Traffic Plan , the Mass Military Reservation (MMR) can shelter an additional 3,000 people when in operation.

Regional shelters will have the supporting resources to provide care to all potential users of the shelters. They allow for the sheltering of pets and transportation for those in need. In addition volunteer medical personnel will be available to address basic, general and special medical needs at the site. Finally, there will be coordinated safety, logistics and communications through local police and fire departments, ARES, other local and regional safety agencies working together to support the sheltering operations, ensure the public's safety and facilitate essential communications.

The regional sheltering plan is designed to integrate and complement local, town management of emergency resources. Local and community shelters can open at any time. In an emergency, each town's Emergency Management Director makes decisions independently on deploying emergency resources, in coordination with regional authorities.

## Your Role as the Media

Red Cross relies on you, the mass media, to communicate critical information to the people of the Cape and Islands in times of emergency. This packet is designed to help you do so quickly and efficiently.

## What to Expect When a Hurricane Approaches

The Red Cross will issue regular press releases by fax and/or email, indicating the locations of Red Cross shelters\* and using the talking points about shelters outlined in this packet. The faxes will bear the Red Cross logo and the familiar NEWS emblem (see sample, attached). If you ever doubt the validity of a press release, call the Red Cross press contact for verification.

*\* Not all shelters opened in a disaster are Red Cross shelters. Some are opened and staffed by town emergency management officials. Red Cross does not publicize these; notification will come directly from each town.*

During the storm, communication may be difficult or impossible.

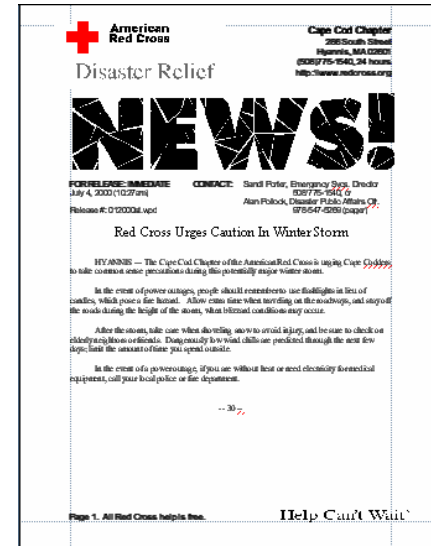
Once the storm passes, shelters will remain open only if the storm has caused enough damage to keep people from returning home. In this case, the shelters will remain open as long as necessary.

In the event that telephone lines are working, press releases will resume by fax, email or phone call.

If phone lines are down, Red Cross will staff a media information center. The center will most likely be located at the Red Cross chapter House, 286 South St., Hyannis. Updates are also possible for those with amateur radios. For details, call the Red Cross *well in advance of the storm*.

The Red Cross will then begin the damage assessment phase of the operation, and may put out the call for volunteers, particularly those with four-wheel-drive vehicles.

Typically, within 72 hours after the storm's passage, Red Cross resources from off-Cape are expected to arrive. Red Cross may open family service centers where people can apply for disaster assistance, and there may be mobile feeding operations around the affected area.



## Press Contact Information

Cape Cod and Islands Chapter Headquarters:  
508-775-1540, press 3

## General Hurricane Talking Points

### Before the storm:

- Prepare a family disaster supplies kit. Check out the web site [www.capecodandislandsredcross.org](http://www.capecodandislandsredcross.org). Be Red Cross Ready and Special Hurricane Information Sheets are available online. Make sure batteries are fresh and food is in good condition.
- Know if your home is prone to flooding. Call your local emergency management official, or the Red Cross at (508) 775 1540.
- Take action when a hurricane WATCH is posted. If you wait for a WARNING, it is too late.
- If you will need to evacuate, plan somewhere to stay.
- If it is safe to weather the storm in your home, remember to board up windows (don't tape them), and secure all outdoor items.
- Know how to turn off the utilities to your house.
- Fill your vehicle's fuel tank.
- Assemble a first aid kit.
- Remove diseased or damaged tree limbs, or ones likely to damage your home.
- Plan a safe place for the family pet. For small pets, those that fit in a carrier, the Red Cross has collaborated with Cape Cod DART to manage pet shelters, located near some Red Cross shelters. Each pet needs to be in its own carrier and owners must be sure to bring food and water for the animal, enough for at least three days. For more information, see What about Pets?
- Check on elderly or infirmed neighbors and help them prepare for the storm.

### During the storm:

- If the power goes out, use flashlights for lighting. Do not use candles.
- Do not call 911 unless there is a real emergency.
- Keep all windows and doors closed tight. It is a dangerous myth that you should leave a window partially open during the storm.
- Remember, the safest place in a house is an interior room on the lowest floor.
- Monitor the battery operated radio for public safety instructions.

### After the storm:

- Beware of downed power lines.
- Cookout grills and generators pose risks of fire and carbon monoxide poisoning if used improperly.
- Be careful! If there is an emergency, help may take time to get to you.
- Use flashlights for lighting. Candles are unsafe, and if you have a fire, help may be delayed reaching you.

## Shelter Information

Since shelter information is continually being updated, a list with potential Red Cross operated Shelters can be found online as well as other updated information at [capecodandislandsredcross.org](http://capecodandislandsredcross.org). In the event of a disaster, press releases will contain up-to-date information on the shelters the Red Cross is operating. Please consider the following points:

- **Not all shelters open for every disaster.** Rely on REPC information request official Red Cross press releases, when publicizing shelter openings.
- **Red Cross shelters are open to everyone**, regardless of where they're from.
- **Some towns open their own shelters**, not operated with the Red Cross. Information on these shelters will be sent to you directly from town emergency management officials.

## Shelter Talking Points

- Red Cross does not *open* shelters. We operate them after they are opened by the Regional Emergency Management Committee and local emergency management officials.
- Don't go to a shelter if:
  - You need regular medical supervision. Call your doctor or your local fire department, using the business telephone number.
  - You feel safe riding out the storm with friends or family, as long as their home is not in an evacuation zone. When in doubt, come to the shelter.
- If you come to a shelter, bring your own bedding. **Cots will be reserved for the elderly and infirmed.** Air mattresses and chaise lounges work nicely.
- Bring snacks. There may be limited food supply in the shelter and it may be awhile before additional food is available.
- Bring your own **prescription medications**.
- Bring **important papers**, including something with your address on it. Don't bring large amounts of cash or valuables, weapons, alcohol or illicit drugs.
- Bring a book, playing cards and quiet activities for children.

## What about pets?

Red Cross people shelters cannot accept pets (though service animals are always welcome). This policy is designed to ensure that Red Cross shelters are safe and comfortable places for everyone. But the Cape Cod and the Islands Chapter of the American Red Cross realizes that, for many people, pets are considered members of the family.

The Cape Cod and the Islands Chapter have taken part in a dialogue with local emergency managers and encouraged them to establish rooms or areas in the facilities which house both Red Cross shelters and where pet owners and their pets can stay separately. **These pet-friendly facilities are located alongside, but are not under the control of Red Cross shelters.**

A key element of the full-service shelter includes being able to provide shelter for pets which is organized by the Cape Cod Disaster Animal Response Team (CCDART). The experiences in past emergencies show that some residents have been reluctant to leave for shelters because they don't want to leave their pets. Currently three out of the six regional shelters can accommodate pets but the plan calls for all six shelters to have this capability.



**CAPE COD  
D.A.R.T.**  
DISASTER ANIMAL RESPONSE TEAM

At the present time in emergency animal care during a declared emergency/disaster will be limited to three proposed Regional shelters with animal care components – Dennis-Yarmouth High School in Yarmouth (DY) , Vocational School in Harwich and the Oak Ridge School in Sandwich (OR). Animals admitted to these shelters will be limited to dogs, cats, ferrets and other small mammals (gerbils, hamsters, guinea pigs, mice, rabbits, potbelly pigs) brought to the shelters by owners or rescuers. Birds, reptiles, fish, arachnids, wild or feral animals, endangered or threatened species, and exotic pets are excluded. Other animal care shelters will be staffed as locations become available .

Pet owners should come prepared with a disaster kit for each pet being admitted to the pet shelter. The pet disaster kit should include the following:

- Medications, a first-aid kit, and medical records stored in a waterproof container. A pet first-aid book is also a handy to have.

- Sturdy leashes, harnesses, and carriers to transport pets safely and to ensure that your pets can't escape. Carriers should be large enough for the animal to stand comfortably, turn around, and lie down. Your pet may have to stay in the carrier for hours as you weather out the storm at a shelter. Be sure to have a secure cage with no loose objects inside it. These may require blankets or towels for bedding and warmth, and other special items.
- Current photos and descriptions of your pets to help others identify them, and to prove that they are yours.
- Bowls, cat litter and litter box, a manual can opener, and enough food and water to feed each of your pets for at least three days. Stock up on non-perishables well ahead of time and add any perishable items at the last minute.
- Information on feeding schedules, medical conditions, behavior problems, and the name and number of your veterinarian.
- Pet beds and toys, if you can easily take them, to reduce stress.
- Other helpful items include newspapers, paper towels, plastic trash bags, grooming items, and household bleach.

Once you have your items collected, keep them accessible and stored in sturdy containers (duffel bags, covered trash containers, etc.) that can be carried easily.

In order to admit your pet(s) to the pet shelter, you must have a pet carrier, leash or halter/lead, litter pan, food and water bowls, medications, medical records, identification papers, a supply of food and some bottled water, etc., **for each animal**. Always keep them together in an easily reached place. Include photos of yourself with each animal to aid in identification later. Each animal needs ID - you cannot possibly have too much identification on your animal!

Owners must care for their own animals in a shelter, under CCDART supervision. Shelter Managers or their designees will normally require the following:

- • Only animals that are prepared – healthy, properly identified and vaccinated, manageable, and restrained (in a crate or cage and on a leash) – will be admitted to the emergency animal care center.
- • Owners are responsible for providing food, water, sanitation and hands-on care during approved visiting hours.
- • Owners are responsible for providing and administering all medications. (Medications generally will not be kept with the animal.)
- • Owners are responsible for cleaning up after their pets. Whether outdoors or indoors, owners must gather and dispose of pet waste and keep crates clean.
- • Once at the shelter, owners must sign a *Pet Owner Sheltering Agreement*.

For more information, please visit CCDART's website, [www.capecoddart.org](http://www.capecoddart.org), or call 508-737-9467.

### **What About Evacuation?**

The vast majority of people who will be on the Cape and Islands when a hurricane strikes will be safely able to shelter in place. Those whose homes are likely to suffer damage from winds or storm surge will be advised to leave for higher ground. Any evacuations are ordered by local or state emergency management officials, not by the Red Cross.

The Massachusetts State Police and the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency have stated that a large-scale evacuation of the Cape and Islands is unnecessary, and most likely, impossible.

Information about sheltering-in-place can be found in the Be Red Cross Ready Brochures, available in English and Portuguese. They can be requested by calling (508)775-1540, by writing to 286 South Street, Hyannis, MA 02601 or are available on-line at [capecodandislandsredcross.org](http://capecodandislandsredcross.org).

When emergency management officials recommend evacuating low-lying costal areas,  
**DO NOT HESITATE.**  
Your family's safety could depend on it.

### **Tips For Reporters**

By alerting the public to the functions of the Red Cross, you are helping to make the Cape and Islands more prepared for disaster. Here are some key points:

- **All Red Cross disaster assistance is free.** It's an outright gift of the American people. Anyone who claims to represent the Red Cross and charges for services is a fraud; notify us or the police immediately.
- We don't receive funding from the government. **We rely entirely on donations.**
- We apologize in advance if, during the course of doing our job, we don't have time to give interviews. All of our volunteers have received some public affairs training, but some may be reluctant or afraid to talk to reporters. Please be patient. Your best option is to **work with the volunteer public affairs officer**, who will generally be able to provide more information anyway.
- We encourage you to report on our activities or photograph us doing our jobs. **We rely on this coverage** to help us raise money.
- But our top priority is service to disaster victims. **Red Cross maintains the strict confidentiality of its clients.** That means:
  - We can't allow reporters or photographers to roam around in a shelter. Instead, talk to the shelter manager, who will help you find an interview or get photos or video of those who are willing. When you arrive at a shelter, please check in with the shelter manager first.
  - We can't disclose whether any individual or family is receiving Red Cross help. We can try and locate people who are willing to give interviews, however.
- Experience shows that **rumors spread quickly** in the wake of disaster. Red Cross relies on you to help us dispel any false information.

### **Official information sources**

Find Red Cross program information at [capecodandislandsredcross.org](http://capecodandislandsredcross.org)

Find National Red Cross information at [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)

Federal Emergency Management Agency: [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)

Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency: [www.mass.gov/mema](http://www.mass.gov/mema)

National Weather Service Taunton Forecast Office: [www.nws.noaa.gov/er/box](http://www.nws.noaa.gov/er/box)

National Hurricane Center: [www.nhc.noaa.gov](http://www.nhc.noaa.gov)

Barnstable County Regional Emergency Planning Committee (BCREPC).

Photos provided by American Red Cross, Cape Cod and Islands Chapter and Kevin Morley, Public Information Officer, Barnstable County Incident Management Team.

# Red Cross - Shelter Locations \*



## **Is America Prepared for the 2009 Hurricane Season? American Red Cross Coastal Preparedness Poll Highlights (2007)**

### **Hurricanes and Their Impact**

- 71% of Gulf Coast residents have experienced at least one hurricane or flood.
- Along the Atlantic coast more than half (56%) have experienced a hurricane or flood.
- Those who have seen the impact of a hurricane or flood firsthand are more likely to have taken steps to protect themselves and their families.
  1. 76% know where they will go if they must evacuate, compared to 64% for those with no experience
  2. 55% have an evacuation plan, compared to 35% for those with no experience
  3. 49% have put together disaster supplies kits, compared to 33% for those with no experience

### **Perception versus Reality**

- Along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, concern about hurricanes and floods has increased significantly since 2004. 38% of these coastal residents report that they are more concerned today than they were prior to Hurricane Katrina.
- These concerns have not led to substantial improvements in disaster preparedness.

### **Build a Kit**

- Only about four in ten households (43%) along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts have a disaster supplies kit.
- Nearly all kits contain a flashlight, water and a battery powered radio. Only three in ten (32%) include instructions for turning off the utilities.
- Among those coastal residents who require dialing medication, 60% do not have a kit that includes them.

### **Make a Plan**

- Less than half of the households along the Gulf and Atlantic coasts (47%) have put together an evacuation plan, but seven in ten residents of these coastal counties have at least determined where they would go if they must evacuate. While this is a six-point improvement from 2004, it still leaves three in ten uncertain about where they would stay if their coastal counties were evacuated.

### **Pre-Katrina and Post-Katrina Preparedness**

- There has been a modest increase in the number of Gulf and Atlantic coast residents who have an evacuation plan (47% compared to 41% in 2004).
- The percentage with a disaster supplies kit has not improved since 2004.
- Four in ten Gulf coast residents (44%) still do not have an evacuation plan.
- Nearly half of Gulf coast residents (48%) do not have a disaster supplies kit.
- Nearly three in ten (28%) have neither a plan or a kit.

*The findings are based on a telephone survey of 751 U.S. adults aged 18 years or older, residing in coastal counties from Maine to Texas, with a supplemental sample of 150 Gulf coast residents. The poll was conducted Issues and Answers, August 12-31, 2007. The margin of error is +/-4% at a 95% confidence level. Where appropriate survey results from 2004 have been included.*