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NEWS RELEASE

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Red Cross Preparing as Hurricane Irene Heads Toward East Coast

Residents Urged to Check Their Storm Preparations Now

FARMINGTON, CONN., August 23, 2011 – Hurricane Irene is expected to make landfall along the eastern shores later this week with winds gusting as high as 150 mph, and the American Red Cross is getting ready for a full East Coast response by preparing shelters for evacuees, pre-positioning numerous emergency response vehicles and disaster supplies, and mobilizing disaster workers to parts of the country expected to see impact from this large storm.

In Connecticut, local Red Cross officials taking steps to prepare people and supplies for any needed response.

“We are checking the availability of our volunteers, reaching out to officials in communities along the shoreline and readying our supplies,” said American Red Cross spokesperson Paul Shipman. “We take these preparedness steps early so that we are ready to respond.”

Shipman said the local preparations mirror what is happening nationally. “Red Cross chapters from Florida to Virginia are working with local and state officials to prepare for the storm’s arrival.”

Shipman said that, along the East Coast, “the American Red Cross is urging people in potential evacuation areas to familiarize themselves with the Red Cross Safe and Well website by visiting www.redcross.org/safeandwell so they can let their loved ones know what their situation is due to the hurricane. The site can be also be accessed by going to www.redcross.org/safeandwell on a smart phone, or by calling 1-800-RED CROSS.”

Shipman said people can also update their Facebook and Twitter status through the Safe and Well site. Affected residents who have should also download the free Red Cross shelter finder app in the Apple iTunes store.

“This storm is getting stronger as it moves toward the East Coast and people who live in or are vacationing in areas that could see its impact need to get ready now,” Shipman said. “We urge them to take the threat of Irene seriously and finalize their hurricane preparations and get their emergency kits ready.”

It’s important for people in the path of the storm to know that a hurricane watch means hurricane conditions could threaten the area within 48 hours. A hurricane warning means hurricane conditions are expected within 36 hours. Those in the affected area should finish their storm preparations and leave the area if authorities ask them to do so.

Even a passing glance from Irene could cause problems in Connecticut, Shipman said, including power outages or flooding. “The same basic readiness tips apply regardless of how severe the storm is. These are steps you should take to be ready for any emergency.”

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The Red Cross urges people to take steps over the next few days as the storm approaches to help ensure their safety and the safety of their loved ones. They include:

- Get a three-day supply of water ready for each person (one gallon per person, per day) on hand, along with food that doesn't require refrigeration, flashlights, a battery-operated radio and a first aid kit.
- Be sure you have several days' supply of any prescriptions you or family members are taking.
- Plan routes to emergency shelters and register family members with special needs with local authorities as required.
- Make plans for pets. Have extra food on hand, as well as any medications they need on a regular basis.
- Bring items inside that can be picked up by the wind.
- As the storm nears, turn the refrigerator and freezer to the coldest settings and keep them closed as much as possible so food will last longer if the power goes out.
- Turn off any propane tanks and unplug small appliances.
- Fill your vehicle's gas tank.
- If high wind is forecast, close windows, doors and hurricane shutters. If hurricane shutters aren't an option, close and board up windows and doors with plywood.

The Red Cross Ready Rating Program (www.readyrating.org) helps businesses and schools prepare for emergencies and disruptions of operations. There are special steps businesses, schools and organizations should take if they are in the path of the hurricane, such as:

- Reviewing emergency response plans and continuity of operations of plans so everyone knows the approved procedures and individual responsibilities.
- Checking their stock of emergency preparedness supplies and safety equipment.
- Ensuring warning or alert systems for employees are in order and employee contact information is up-to-date.
- Storing employee emergency contact information and other important files on and off-site.

Red Cross workers in countries in the Caribbean are already responding to Hurricane Irene. In Haiti, where many victims of last year's earthquake are still living in camps, disaster preparedness activities have been ongoing for months. Ahead of the storm, camp committees were notified and emergency response teams put on alert. The Dominican Republic Red Cross evacuated residents ahead of the storm and provided emergency shelters for those affected. The Bahamas Red Cross is coordinating with the national emergency office to initiate preparedness activities. And, the Turks and Caicos Red Cross has volunteers ready to assist in community shelters, as well as provide first aid.

American Red Cross disaster preparedness starts long before a hurricane makes landfall, beginning with keeping supplies and equipment on stand-by all year to help people in need. On average, the Red Cross spends about $450 million on disaster relief every year. If someone would like to support Red Cross disaster efforts, they can make a donation to American Red Cross Disaster Relief by visiting www.redcross.org, calling 1-800-RED CROSS, texting the word REDCROSS to 90999 to make a $10 donation, or sending contributions to their local Red Cross chapter or to the American Red Cross, P.O. Box 37243, Washington, DC 20013.

Help people affected by disasters like hurricanes or flooding 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 prepare for disasters and provide shelter, food, emotional support and other assistance to victims of all disasters. Call 1-800-REDCROSS (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 redcross.org.

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