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News Release
NEWS RELEASE

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Holiday Weekend is Busy One for the Red Cross

Seven Fires Displace 61 People Between Christmas Eve and Sunday

FARMINGTON, CONN., December 28, 2009 – The Christmas Holiday weekend proved a busy one for the American Red Cross Connecticut Chapter as it responded to fires in Bridgeport, Hartford, Montville and Waterbury. The Red Cross is helping 61 people displaced by the seven fires. The Red Cross has committed more than \$12,000 in aid as a result of these fires.

The busy stretch began late on December 23 with a fire on Bishop Road in Waterbury that displaced 10 people. Red Cross volunteers cleared the scene at 1:30 a.m. on Christmas Eve. Later in the day on December 24 a fire displaced six people in Montville on Norwich Road. An early morning fire on Christmas Day in Bridgeport forced four people from their home on Frenchtown Road. Two late evening fires on Christmas Day in Hartford, on Garden Street and on Babcock Street, displaced a total of 25 people. The same team responded to the back-to-back Hartford fires. The active pace continued on December 26 with a fire on Rockwell Avenue in Bloomfield driving four people from their home. Once again in Hartford on December 27, the Red Cross responded to a multi-family fire on Mansfield Street that displaced 12 people.

Red Cross disaster assistance in the wake of fires can include temporary lodging and financial support for emergency needs such as clothing, food, baby items and certain household needs that help to get a family through the difficult first few days after a fire. Red Cross responders also provide comfort kits, which include personal care items like toothbrushes, soap, razors and special items for children and babies, including diapers and baby wipes. Often, Red Cross volunteers are able to provide small stuffed toys for children who may have left a precious “friend” behind in the rush to escape the house. Licensed mental health professionals are also part of Red Cross Disaster Action Teams and can offer important emotional support. Disaster Action Teams are made up primarily of volunteers who are available to respond on a twenty-four-hour-a-day basis.

Connecticut Chapter CEO Dianne Auger praised the volunteers for their dedication. “The people who volunteer for us give so much to the effort. Responses can be very chaotic and can take several hours. To do this on a holiday is especially important. It is such a comfort to the people who have been displaced by fires to have that reassuring presence.”

Auger said the assistance provided is made possible by donations. “We receive no government funding for this assistance. The blankets wrapped around people affected by disaster, the lodging, the clothing and food assistance are all provided by generous private donors. These donors turn compassion into action through their gifts.”

Auger also noted that Red Cross Chapter is now distributing comfort kits assembled and donated by Clean Sweep Restoration Services of New England, a restoration company specializing in repair of disaster-related damage. “Clean Sweep’s gift means that more Red Cross funds can go to direct assistance, rather than the purchase of comfort kits.”

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Auger said the Red Cross typically sees an increase in fire activity during the winter months and urged people to use caution when cooking, decorating for the holidays, or in heating their homes. “Be especially careful with lighted candles, with using space heaters and with lighting Christmas trees,” Auger said. “Make sure you keep your trees well-watered and watch for overly dry branches. Never leave decorations or candles lit when unattended.” Auger urged people to make sure that their furnaces and chimneys are properly maintained to avoid fire and carbon monoxide hazards. “Preventive maintenance and common sense caution are keys to home fire safety.”

More safety tips are available from the Red Cross by calling 1-877-287-3327 or visiting www.ctredcross.org.

American Red Cross disaster assistance is free of charge, a gift made possible by generous donations and the work of volunteers. For more information about the Red Cross and how you can help, visit www.ctredcross.org.

About the American Red Cross in Connecticut:

The American Red Cross in Connecticut helps people prevent, prepare for and respond to emergencies. Last year, more than 8,000 volunteers and a small corps of employees helped victims of more than 425 local disasters; taught emergency preparedness and lifesaving skills to more than 223,000 Connecticut Residents; provided international tracing and message services to nearly 70 Connecticut residents seeking loved ones separated by disaster or war; and helped more than 1,100 Connecticut military families with emergency communications and other services. Nearly 100,000 Connecticut citizens gave blood through the Red Cross, which supplies blood and blood products to the State's acute care hospitals and transfusing facilities. The American Red Cross is part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. An average of 91 cents of every dollar the Red Cross spends is invested in humanitarian services and programs. The Red Cross is not a government agency; it relies on donations of time, money and blood to do its work.

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