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IEMA Highlights Role of Volunteers in Disasters

Volunteers assist with preparedness, response and recovery

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) is highlighting ways Illinois residents can volunteer and provide critical assistance when disaster strikes.

IEMA is partnering with local emergency management agencies throughout the month of April to educate people about how they can get connected with reputable organizations and lend a helping hand with disaster preparedness and with response and recovery efforts in the aftermath of a disaster.

“Before disaster strikes, volunteers can promote personal preparedness to help people stay safe during emergencies,” said IEMA Acting Director William P. Robertson. “When disaster strikes, voluntary organizations help people in their community, region or across the country. Volunteer organizations even play a vital role in ensuring the long-term recovery of a community affected by a disaster.”

Robertson said following a disaster, many people express interest in helping those impacted by the event. He said it’s best to volunteer through a reputable disaster relief organization before disaster strikes. The National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (www.nvoad.org) maintains a national database of voluntary and charitable organizations involved in a variety of activities, including emergency preparedness and response throughout the nation.

More than 50 Illinois communities have established Community Emergency Response Teams (CERTs). These volunteer groups work to make their communities safer, stronger and better prepared to respond to and recover from emergencies. Illinois CERT members have assisted with damage assessments, donations management, spontaneous volunteer management and in Multi-Agency Resource Centers following recent disasters in Illinois. More about CERT is available at <https://www.ready.gov/community-emergency-response-team>.

During disasters, representatives from the American Red Cross and the Salvation Army have liaisons in IEMA’s State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) to coordinate with state agencies, mutual aid organizations and others on response and recovery efforts. In addition, other voluntary organizations are represented in the SEOC by Illinois’ Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster.

Disaster volunteer opportunities vary by community. People interested in learning more volunteer opportunities can contact local voluntary organizations or their local emergency management agency.