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**SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
Subcommittee on State, Local, and Private Sector
Preparedness and Integration**

**TESTIMONY OF SUZY DeFRANCIS
CHIEF PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER
AMERICAN RED CROSS**

Good morning Chairman Pryor, Mr. Sununu and Members of the Subcommittee. The topic of this hearing – community preparedness – is an important issue for the American Red Cross. As a national leader in preparedness, health and safety training, we work in communities across the country everyday helping individuals, families, businesses and schools to be better prepared and *Be Red Cross Ready* for disasters and other emergencies.

Introduction

The mission of the American Red Cross is to help people prevent, prepare for, and respond to disasters and other emergencies. We shelter, feed, and counsel victims of disasters at home and abroad; collect and distribute nearly half of the nation's blood supply; teach lifesaving skills; and support military members and families through emergency communications. So whether it is a hurricane or heart attack; a call for blood or a call for help, the Red Cross is there around the corner, around the Nation, and around the world.

Although we are guided by a congressional charter, and we have specific responsibilities under the National Response Framework, we are not a government agency. We depend on voluntary contributions of time, money and blood to perform our humanitarian mission.

Each year, the American Red Cross, through its more than 700 chapters, responds to approximately 74,000 disasters. So far this year, we have responded to disasters across the country, including in California, Missouri, Virginia, Illinois, Tennessee, Arkansas and Iowa. Additionally, through the generosity of our donors, we have contributed more than \$22 million in financial assistance to help the survivors in Myanmar and China.

Joining me this morning is Scott Conner who serves as Senior Vice President, Preparedness and Health and Safety Services for the Red Cross. Scott oversees all of the

development and implementation of our Preparedness and Health and Safety programs and the products and services that help individuals, families and communities prepare for disasters and other life-threatening emergencies.

American Red Cross training and educational programs help to save lives and empower people to respond to disasters and other life-threatening emergencies – from a hurricane to a heart attack. Last year, 17 million people participated in Red Cross preparedness education and training courses including community disaster education presentations, first aid, CPR and AED training: this is equivalent to 46,000 people a day. We are committed to providing this life-saving training and to doing our part to build a culture of preparedness across the country.

This is an optimal time to hold a hearing focused on preparedness. After a spring season that saw a record-breaking number of tornadoes and other severe weather events, we have now officially entered hurricane season. After two relatively quiet hurricane seasons in the United States, it's important that we not let the public be lulled into a sense of complacency in hurricane prone states. It is also important to take this opportunity to educate people living in other parts of the country about hazards that can affect them, such as the severe weather that often accompanies hurricanes.

Additionally, this week we also recognize the first National CPR/AED Awareness Week. As part of a national effort to highlight how lives can be saved if more people learn cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and how to use an automated external defibrillator (AED), the American Red Cross, through our network over 700 chapters, will be conducting mass trainings, hosting events and offering educational information on the importance of CPR and AED training. We join the American Heart Association and the National Safety Council in this effort.

Be Red Cross Ready

Research tells us that the vast majority of individuals in the United States are not prepared. This should be of concern for us all. In April 2007 Harris Interactive conducted a national online survey of over 2,500 respondents to support the Red Cross in our disaster preparedness efforts. When given a list of actions specific to those in our *Be Red Cross Ready* campaign and asked whether they had done any of them to prepare in the event of an emergency, almost a third (29%) had not taken one single action step included on the list. Only 7% of the respondents had taken all of the necessary preparedness actions. Even among people living in hurricane prone areas, an August 2007 poll conducted by *Issues and Answers* found that while concern about hurricanes and floods has increased significantly since 2004, these concerns have not led to substantial changes in disaster preparedness.

One of our greatest challenges is getting people to take preparedness actions in the absence of an immediate disaster threat and getting people trained in life-saving skills to the point where it becomes second nature so they can respond appropriately when the unexpected happens.

The good news is that the majority of Americans say they would get prepared if it were easier to do. (Wirthlin Worldwide's National Quorum of 1,001 adults over the age of 18) That is why we've worked to create audience-specific programs and online educational tools and developed partnerships with businesses, schools, and community organizations that allow us to make this lifesaving information more accessible.

In September 2006, the American Red Cross released our national preparedness campaign: *Be Red Cross Ready*. It is important to note the *Be Red Cross Ready* program represents a cooperative effort between the American Red Cross and the Department of Homeland Security's Ready Campaign. Initially, American Red Cross and DHS relayed different messages. However, to provide Emergency Managers of the largest cities with the same nationally developed messaging, we worked collaboratively with DHS to coordinate a consistent campaign that could also be localized. This alignment of messaging helps decrease the amount of information clutter and potential confusion created by multiple national preparedness messages.

The *Be Red Cross Ready* campaign offers easy-to-use tools incorporated into three basic action steps:

- 1) Get a Kit
- 2) Make a Plan
- 3) Be Informed

I will give you a quick overview of each step:

Get a Kit

What you have on hand when an emergency happens can make a big difference. The Red Cross recommends having at least three days worth of food, water (1 gallon per person, per day) and other items for everyone in your household, including your pets. You should have an easy-to-carry evacuation kit, with additional supplies at home in case you are unable to leave.

Make a Plan

Preparing your communication and evacuation plans ahead of time make it easier to respond in a disaster situation where every second counts. The Red Cross recommends sitting down with members of your household to identify an out-of-area contact that everyone can call in an emergency and designate two meeting places: 1) right outside your home in case of a sudden disaster, such as a fire and 2) outside your area, in case you are unable to return to your home.

Be Informed

When an emergency happens, your community can change in an instant. Knowing the types of emergencies that may happen in your area and how you may be able to respond makes all the difference. The Red Cross recommends that people follow the advice of local officials during a disaster and listen for updates on a battery- or crank-operated

NOAA weather radio. This message also incorporates the importance of knowing and understanding the use of an AED, CPR and basic first aid, so that you have the information you need to help save a life in an emergency. The goal of the American Red Cross is for all individuals to be within four minutes of an AED device and for at least one person in every household and office floor to be trained in CPR, AED and first aid.

To reach a wide audience with this vital information, our network of Red Cross chapters delivers disaster education programs in communities across the country on a daily basis. We've also developed an online education module that walks people through the three actions we recommend people take to become *Red Cross Ready*. This module, available at www.redcross.org, includes streaming video demonstrations depicting three CPR/AED skills areas of Conscious Choking, CPR and AED use for adults. It also includes additional resources to help people get prepared including a downloadable disaster supplies kit checklist and emergency contact card.

Mr. Chairman, as we transition to a new administration next year, the Red Cross asks you and your colleagues to encourage continuity of this three step plan. We believe that sustaining this clear, uniform message will help us, DHS, and other groups and organizations that depend on this plan to cultivate a "culture of preparedness."

Community Preparedness Programs

The bulk of Red Cross programs and services are delivered through a vibrant network of over 700 community and regional chapters located across the U.S. Chapters are able to tailor national programs to meet the diverse needs of their specific communities. Often through their interaction with their communities, chapters implement programs and partnerships that further our community preparedness goals by working with local businesses, schools, emergency management, public health departments and Citizen Corps Councils.

This morning, I would like to highlight a few examples of how local Red Cross chapters are working with partners in their communities. Programs like these are successful because they are community-wide initiatives that engage multiple stakeholders and reach people where they live, learn, work and play.

Partnering with Businesses

Private sector partnerships are valuable not only in that they allow us to leverage additional resources to further our shared preparedness goals, but also because businesses can play a key role in encouraging preparedness among their employees and community.

Red Cross Ready Rating

In February 2008, the St. Louis Area Chapter of the American Red Cross launched the *Red Cross Ready Rating Program*, designed to engage and guide local businesses, schools and organizations to prepare for disasters and other emergencies. This membership program is currently being pilot tested in the St. Louis area and we hope to expand it nationally.

Participants first sign a Membership Agreement committing them to take steps to become better prepared within the coming year. They then utilize an online questionnaire tool that helps them assess their disaster vulnerabilities and discover where they “rate” in the process of developing and implementing an emergency response plan. Once they understand their level of preparedness and what still needs to be done to be fully aligned with the program, the website offers information and examples to help achieve their goals.

This program encourages community preparedness in multiple ways. Participating members receive a *Ready Rating* Member Seal to display on their websites or otherwise show that they are committed to being more prepared. Part of their evaluation “rating” looks at the group’s actions and effectiveness when it comes to encouraging and strengthening disaster preparedness within their own community. In effect, this helps groups look beyond their immediate preparedness needs to identify ways they can help their communities get better prepared, such as holding a blood drive. Additionally, membership is renewed annually and based on continual improvements in preparedness from one year to the next. Since the project launch in February, 37 groups have signed on to this program including 11 businesses, 18 schools and 8 community organizations.

Ready When the Time Comes

Ready When the Time Comes is a corporate volunteer program created through a partnership with W.W. Grainger and the Greater Chicago Chapter of the American Red Cross in 2001. Through this program, volunteers from businesses and organizations sign up to be trained as Red Cross disaster response workers in one of four functions: sheltering; mass care feeding; damage assessment; and community response center. Today more than 1,000 volunteers from 15 Chicago-area companies have been trained.

Following the 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons, W. W. Grainger and the American Red Cross took this program to a national level. Now entering its third year, this pilot program includes 16 American Red Cross chapters that have trained more than 4,000 volunteers from over 100 corporate partners participating in the program.

This collaboration is a win-win for all involved. Partner organizations make a valuable contribution to their communities and show their employees, customers and others that they care, while Red Cross chapters gain an extensive network of well-trained volunteers who can quickly mobilize to respond to local large-scale disasters.

Partnering with Schools and Community Organizations

Like businesses, schools and community organizations can also play a role in encouraging preparedness. We know that children can influence their parents to take specific actions and serve as a conduit through which to reach adults with our preparedness message.

Masters of Disaster

The American Red Cross of Greater Columbus and Columbus Public Health in Ohio are working collaboratively to implement the Red Cross’ *Masters of Disaster* preparedness

education program in seven Settlement Houses, which serve as neighborhood and community centers across the city. Jointly, Red Cross volunteers and health educators are training teacher aids in the Settlement Houses to integrate *Masters of Disaster* into children's after-school and summer programs at the K-2 and 3-5 grade levels. The children in these programs live in some of the most underserved areas of the city and the goal is to familiarize them with the overall concepts of disaster preparedness and safety, as well as learn how the Red Cross and local health department responds to emergencies in their community.

Arkansas Seniors Are Prepared

Arkansas Seniors Are Prepared (ASAP) is a cooperative effort among the American Red Cross, FEMA, the Arkansas Department of Emergency Management, the Arkansas Department of Health and the Arkansas Department of Human Services/Division of Aging and Adult Services to help senior citizens get better prepared. ASAP is an outreach program based on the *Be Red Cross Ready* campaign that provides older individuals living in Arkansas information about the three necessary steps to prepare for a disaster or other emergency: 1) Get a kit, 2) Make a plan, 3) Be informed. Since this program began in January 2007, ASAP has trained approximately 2,200 senior adults. The program currently boasts about 145 certified facilitators across the state. Realizing that Arkansas is a growing retirement state, we are pleased to offer such a successful outreach program specifically tailored to older individuals.

Culture of Preparedness

Like the programs I presented today, there are others that have been successful in making preparedness “top of mind” among individuals everyday while providing the information and training to help them get prepared. As this Subcommittee continues exploring citizen preparedness and looking for solutions that may help raise the level of awareness, we recommend that you carefully examine these efforts and realize what makes them truly successful: the application of a consistent, nationally recognized message to initiatives tailored to the needs of communities on the local level and the engagement of local businesses, schools, neighborhoods and families, that embrace this message and take action.

We’ve seen many examples of businesses, schools, places of worship, non-governmental organizations and the government coming together after a disaster to aid in the relief and recovery effort. However, now is the time for these same entities to come together and identify ways for their communities to get better prepared before a disaster or emergency strikes.

Mr. Chairman, we thank you, and the Members of this Committee for helping us make preparedness a priority. As leaders in your communities, you can do much to encourage preparedness. We encourage all Members of Congress and their staff to learn and understand the types of disasters that may impact your constituents, and take action to make sure you, your staff and your office is prepared for disaster. Get trained in first aid, CPR and AED use, and encourage others to do the same. Share vital preparedness

information with your constituents and direct them toward resources that can help them get better prepared such as their local Red Cross chapter.

Conclusion

Chairman Pryor, Senator Sununu, and Members of the Committee, thank you again for allowing the American Red Cross to share with you our vision and showcase some of our outreach efforts as we continue to help people prevent, prepare for and respond to disasters and other emergencies. It is vital that individuals and families realize the importance of preparing for all types of disasters and life-threatening emergencies and that they take action to prepare now so they can respond appropriately when the unexpected happens— from administering CPR to a neighbor going into cardiac arrest to having practiced a fire escape plan to to evacuating your community before a hurricane strikes.

We look forward to the opportunity of working with you, your colleagues, DHS, FEMA, our friends and colleagues in the nonprofit community and corporate sector in carrying out this life-saving message.