

2-1-1 Texas: A Critical Tool during Disaster

September 8, 2008

2-1-1 Texas supports people affected by disasters. Hurricane Gustav's attack on the Gulf Coast is just one of the many disasters that 2-1-1 Texas has confronted in recent years. With more than two million residents evacuated from the Texas Coast and Louisiana to surrounding areas, the twenty-five call centers that make up the 2-1-1 Texas system mobilized to lend a hand. East Texas is served by 2-1-1 East Texas and is a program of the United Way of Tyler/Smith County in collaboration with the Texas Health and Human Services Division. Visit www.uwtyler.org to access a database of resources available in the local area.

2-1-1 has been integral to Hurricane Relief efforts for several years and is widely promoted as the number to call for all non-emergency questions. It is strongly supported by Governor Rick Perry and the Texas Legislature. 2-1-1 Texas was made a part of the Governor's Homeland Security Strategy in 2005 and is activated to respond to any disaster that has an impact on our State. The system often lends a helping hand to neighboring states that experience an overwhelming need to supply critical, correct information quickly and efficiently to a large segment of people.

More than 150 trained staff and volunteers, mobilized to provide support 24 hours a day to over 15,000 callers impacted by Hurricane Gustav. That support continues today, as we continue to assist the residents of the Gulf Coast until everyone is home. 2-1-1 Texas answers disaster calls related to:

storm information

family reunification/status

social services

evacuation/re-entry

shelters

public health alerts

missing persons

victims assistance

critical medical needs

transportation needs

The power of the national 2-1-1 network is also apparent during times of crisis. When one area experiences a disaster, the national network stands ready to respond to ensure those affected have the information they need. In addition to Texas, 2-1-1 call centers across the country including Atlanta, California, and Missouri assisted with Hurricane Gustav. In June 2008, Texas 2-1-1 Directors traveled to Iowa to staff and manage disaster centers during the floods.

Following the September 11 attacks, 2-1-1's role during disasters became apparent. Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, having observed 2-1-1's effectiveness in neighboring Connecticut, where a statewide 2-1-1 system was in place, noted, "We need this in New York. We need this everywhere."

In fact, a FEMA report not only recognized the role of 2-1-1 but also made a strong recommendation that 2-1-1 be made available nationwide. The Brookings Institution and Urban Institute collaborated on a study concluding that those affected by disasters "found it difficult to connect with resources, due to a social services infrastructure that does not support a simple and efficient method for people to learn about and access services."

2-1-1 has become a critical resource in times of disaster. Tens of thousands of Americans utilized 2-1-1 during and immediately following Hurricane(s) Katrina, Rita, Humberto Dolly and Gustav. Other disasters in which 2-1-1 played a critical role include tornadoes and flooding in the Midwest, snowstorms in Denver and Buffalo, heat waves in St. Louis, wildfires in California and Arizona, and chemical spills in South Carolina. To learn more about 2-1-1 Texas and the twenty five regional call centers that make up the statewide system please visit