



# Faith Communities & Disaster Sheltering

In New York City, disaster sheltering is accomplished through partnership with City agencies and nonprofit human service organizations. While there are opportunities for houses of worship to engage in short-term disaster sheltering activities, religious institutions are uniquely positioned to assist with sheltering when disasters cause significant housing loss. While schools (a traditional shelter location) must revert to their original function, houses of worship can support long-term housing needs in culturally appropriate ways.

## Do an All-Hazards Facilities Assessment:

- **How much large space(s) do you have?** American Red Cross in Greater New York uses a guide of 20 to 40 square feet per person to estimate capacity. Follow the Department's or Building's code for your facility.
- **How many smaller areas/offices could be used?** Do you have specialized areas such as a nurses station?
- **How many restrooms and showers are available?**
- What type of **equipment/supplies** and services are available: public address systems, computers, generators, recreation equipment, and payphones?
- **Kitchen facilities.** Do you have a commercial kitchen? How many meals can be prepared there? Are there restrictions on who can use the kitchen?
- Are your building and bathrooms **accessible for people with disabilities?**
- **All-Hazards considerations.** Consider what hazards your facility may be vulnerable to, for instance:
  - **Is your building in a hurricane evacuation zone?** Find out at [www.nyc.gov/oem/hurricanezones](http://www.nyc.gov/oem/hurricanezones).
  - Does your designated dormitory space have **exposed windows** (making it inappropriate for pre-hurricane sheltering)?

### Ready Receiving Centers:

There are facilities that provide respite to people during the evacuation phases of a disaster. NYDIS is piloting the Ready Receiving Centers concept for use during large-scale evacuations. Contact NYDIS for details: [www.nydis.org](http://www.nydis.org) or call 212.669.6100.

## Consider the Following:

- **Under what circumstances would you like to offer your space?** For disasters in your neighborhood? For large-scale city-wide disasters?
- **What other programs use your building?** How will an agreement to use your house of worship as a shelter affect them?
- Can you provide a **24-hour contact for access** to your house of worship?
- **Who from your staff will remain on-site during shelter operations?** Who is their back-up?
  - Does your house of worship **insurance policy** cover shelter operations?

## If You Decide To Offer Your House of Worship as a Disaster Shelter:

- **Contact American Red Cross in Greater New York** to discuss specifics about your house of worship. You may be asked to fill out a site survey or host a walk-through. If you would like to apply to be a Red Cross shelter, there are a number of options including becoming a Red Cross Shelter, Partner Shelter, or Supported Shelter. These options vary in terms of Red Cross staff and resources provided. For more information, visit [www.nyredcross.org](http://www.nyredcross.org) or call 212.875.2479.

- **Sign an agreement that includes:**

- Reimbursement for damages and other liability issues
- Process for turning the facility back over to you
- Responsibilities for staffing, clean-up, etc.

- **Register with HOWCALM™ (House of Worship Community Asset Logistics Management)**

HOWCALM™ is a secure, web-based database system, built by NYDIS, to track faith-based logistics and resources in New York City. As a faith leader, you can use HOWCALM™ to assess the capacity for your house of worship to be a disaster shelter or a Ready Receiving Center (see box). Register at [www.howcalm.org](http://www.howcalm.org). For more information, visit [www.nydis.org](http://www.nydis.org) or contact NYDIS 212.669.6100.



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## Other Ways You Can Support the Disaster Sheltering System in NYC

- **Provide Volunteers**
  - Encourage members of your **house of worship to train to manage and staff other American Red Cross in Greater New York shelters**, or your own facility (see below). Encourage your congregants to become American Red Cross in Greater New York shelter volunteers. [www.nyredcross.org](http://www.nyredcross.org).
- **Provide Support Services**
  - Extend your existing services to shelter populations. Especially consider this if you have complimentary expertise: child care services, pregnancy services, recreation specialists, language and culture expertise, etc.
  - **Disaster Chaplains are often needed in shelters.** In NYC, NYDIS offers Disaster Chaplaincy training and services for our member faith communities. Visit [www.nydis.org](http://www.nydis.org)
- **Provide Expertise**
  - Even if you are unable to offer your facility or provide volunteers, engage in discussion with NYDIS and American Red Cross in Greater New York about sheltering in your neighborhood. You can offer advice on how to offer services that are culturally appropriate and/or suggest other neighborhood resources to support sheltering.

### Know Your Limits:

Be aware of your physical and location capabilities, even if you are not planning on using your facility as a shelter. People may come to your house of worship during a crisis. Check to see if your house of worship is in a hurricane evacuation zone:

[www.nyc.gov/oem](http://www.nyc.gov/oem)

## Hurricane Shelter Plan for NYC

- Hurricane shelters are situated away from areas where storm surge (high water) is likely to occur. They provide basic food and water. For large-scale events, cots and blankets and other supports are available only on a limited basis. Other supportive services are planned for disaster shelters that are open longer than a few days.
- When **an evacuation is ordered** by the Mayor, either in anticipation of a disaster or immediately after an unanticipated event happens, shelters will open to accommodate displaced residents who have no other place to go.
- **To learn more about Evacuation Zones** and where to find the Evacuation Center nearest to your house of worship, go to [www.nyc.gov/oem/hurricanezones](http://www.nyc.gov/oem/hurricanezones).

## Spontaneous Sheltering

- **During crisis, people may naturally come to your house of worship. Here are some tips on what to do:**
  - Make contact with the American Red Cross, which will be able to help you get information regarding the disaster and possibly additional resources. If an overnight facility is needed, call 311 to learn about other facilities that may be better suited (if your house of worship is not well-suited for overnight accommodations). Visit [www.nyredcross.org](http://www.nyredcross.org) or call 1.877.REDCROSS.
- **If individuals must stay at your house of worship overnight:**
  - **Think of safety** and meeting basic needs – food, water, blankets, comfort. Look to congregation members for help.
  - Make efforts to get **updated information** and share it with shelter residents. Seek news from television, radio, 311, internet, etc.
  - **Inventory and prioritize** use of your supplies.
  - **Be proactive in identifying needs** that may arise, such as baby supplies, and tap into available community resources.

## Sheltering-in-Place

Sometimes, officials may recommend that people “shelter-in-place” rather than evacuate. This is likely to occur if there is a release (intentionally or unintentionally) of biological, chemical, or radiological materials into the air. The idea behind sheltering-in-place is to put a physical barrier between you and the matter that is in the air. Some steps you can take if this occurs:

- **Listen for instructions** from officials
- **Seal off any openings in your home**, such as windows and doors: use masking tape and/or plastic sheeting
- **Move to an interior space** above the ground floor

To learn more about sheltering-in-place and what you can do when this occurs, read the American Red Cross’ “Shelter-in-Place” fact sheet at [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org): Go to Disaster Services, then navigate to Be Prepared, and click on “Shelter-in-Place.” Visit the OEM website for more information: [www.nyc.gov/html/oem/html/ready/emergency\\_sip.shtml](http://www.nyc.gov/html/oem/html/ready/emergency_sip.shtml).

### NEW YORK DISASTER INTERFAITH SERVICES

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