

# Getting everyone out safely

The Sacramento Bee  
TUESDAY  
August 29, 2006

METRO  
www.sacbee.com/news



Sacramento Bee/Randall Benton

Volunteers, from left, Lynda Toenyes, Diana Bradham, Phyllis Dowers-Leahy and, foreground, Lucinda Seaton, assemble evacuation kits Monday at the Red Cross office in Sacramento. About 10,000 packages have been put together, and plans call for their distribution beginning Sept. 11 – shortly before the rainy season.

## HOW TO GET THE 'SAFELY OUT' KIT

Starting Sept. 11, residents can get the kit assembled by the American Red Cross and Citizen Voice. It includes:

- A refrigerator magnet booklet with evacuation information and a place for residents to write down the names of friends and family who can help them leave.
- A door hanger that lets emergency officials know whether you have left your residence or need help.
- Four information sheets for friends and family who can help you in an emergency.
- A wallet card with information about evacuating.
- A storage bag for medicine, critical information and other essentials.

To get the kits, residents can:

- Go online to [www.citizenvoice.org](http://www.citizenvoice.org)
- Call Citizen Voice at (916) 503-3194.
- Go to the American Red Cross headquarters at Volunteer Lane, near Watt Avenue and Folsom Boulevard.

## Groups' disaster kits will help the vulnerable if a flood hits

By Phillip Reese  
BEE STAFF WRITER

In the year since Hurricane Katrina left tens of thousands of residents – mostly the elderly, poor and disabled – stranded in the drenched city of New Orleans, Sacramento County officials have warned they likely could not evacuate everyone who would need help if a large flood hit here.

Concerned, the local American Red Cross chapter and a new group called Citizen Voice went to work, and the results will be announced today: a kit to help the vulnerable get out of their

homes in a disaster.

Items in the kit include a waterproof paper doorknob hanger that says "Safely Out" on one side and "Need Help" on the other – to signal emergency officials whether residents need assistance.

Also included is a refrigerator magnet to remind the disabled residents, or anyone assisting them, of three or four people who have agreed to help them leave their home.

That magnet is necessary, officials say, because it's not safe to count entirely on the government during a disaster.

► KITS, Page B3

## Kits: City's still working on plan to assist poor, elderly, disabled

► FROM PAGE B1

A Bee analysis in January of census data and state flood maps found that more than 150,000 poor, elderly and disabled Sacramento residents live in areas prone to flooding. A Sacramento County grand jury report a few months later faulted local officials for lacking an adequate plan to get those residents out and called for such a plan to be completed by this month.

But it's not done. County Emergency Operations Coordinator Rick Martinez said that while his agency is working on a plan, it was delayed by emergency demands during the recent heat wave. Martinez said it should be ready this fall.

Michael Dunne, an advocate with Resources for Independent Living, a local nonprofit group that works with the poor, elderly and disabled, isn't holding his breath.

"The wheels of government

turn slowly," said Dunne, who is partially blind.

That's why the Red Cross program is "a good start," Dunne said. "Not counting on government – that's a good thing, too."

Officials will start giving out the kits on Sept. 11 during a kickoff event at a location yet to be determined. When officials have nailed down the site, they will post the location on [www.citizenvoice.org](http://www.citizenvoice.org), and it will be printed in The Bee.

Using about \$500,000 in donations, nonprofit leaders have assembled about 10,000 kits and plan to order more as needed. A \$10 donation is requested, but not required.

"There's a big, gaping hole in disaster planning," said Gary Dietrich, president of Citizen Voice, the community action group working with the Red Cross. "We've got a lot of people here who are vulnerable, and there is no plan."

Local government officials are behind the Red Cross plan;

Sheriff John McGinness and Martinez will be at the news conference today. Still, Martinez remained uncertain whether the effort will catch on.

"I think it is a good thing," Martinez said. But, he added, "We've never quite seen what will take hold and work."

The Red Cross has assigned several people to raise funds for the project. They've also been beefing up the ranks of volunteers for floods and other disasters who could handle evacuees once they arrive at designated shelters. The difficulty will be getting them there.

"We are good partners with the government," said Joe Ayer, chief operating officer of the Sacramento Sierra Chapter of the American Red Cross. "But when big things hit, it's going to be tough. It's just not going to be enough."

☐ ☐ ☐  
The Bee's Phillip Reese can be reached at (916) 321-1137 or [preese@sacbee.com](mailto:preese@sacbee.com).