Instructions on Shelter Reporting Procedures
January 2014

Purpose: The purpose of this document is to ensure roles, responsibilities and expectations for shelter reporting in the state of Florida during an incident are understood by shelter reporting users and stakeholders

Scope: The procedures outlined herein pertain to reporting on general population and Special Needs shelters within the state of Florida using the American Red Cross (ARC) National Shelter System (NSS). These procedures do not apply to Refuges of Last Resort.

Situation: The Florida State Emergency Response Team (SERT) has adopted the American Red Cross NSS as the official source for all sheltering reporting within the state during an event. All Florida Shelters with an "Open" status in the NSS, and the shelter population, are displayed on a public web site maintained by the Florida Division of Emergency Management (DEM). This public web site is populated via a direct data feed from the NSS. The web site is located at the following URL: http://floridadisaster.org/shelters/summary.htm

FloridaEvacutes.com (http://floridaevacuates.com/) is another state web site that provides directions to all shelters designated as open in the NSS. This service can be utilized by the public via the Internet or an App can be downloaded to a cell phone or tablet. The American Red Cross also has a Hurricane App and a Shelter app that can be downloaded to a cell phone or tablet.

Public shelters in Florida are designated as either general population or special needs, though some shelters may be designated for both populations. Special Needs Shelters (SpNS), established by Statute and Rule, are staffed and resourced to maintain the current health, safety and wellbeing of medically dependant individuals who are not acutely ill, or who may need additional assistance in a shelter due to physical, mental, behavioral, cognitive or sensory disabilities.

The state public web site reports the number and populations of open general population and Special Needs Shelters, by county. The top of the site displays summary data for both general and Special Needs shelters. Special Needs shelter data is collected and displayed using those shelters in the NSS with a Shelter Population Type of "Medical." The words "Special Needs" are also in the Shelter Name field after the assigned name of the shelter.

This reporting requirement necessitates that facilities used for both general and Special Needs populations are assigned two Shelter Numbers with the same address. One Shelter Number has a Shelter Population Type of General and the other of Medical. Each County is required to have a designated Special Needs Shelter for clients, with these locations entered into the NSS. In small events the County may decide to co-locate Special Needs clients in the general population shelter instead of in the designated Special Needs Shelters. If the general population shelter has not already been utilized in a dual use fashion, then a new Special

Needs Medical shelter must be created in NSS by ARC in order to capture the Special Needs shelter populations.

Shelter reporting: The American Red Cross has assumed responsibility in Florida for data entry of all sheltering information into NSS, regardless of whether the Red Cross is operating the shelter or not. The Red Cross is responsible for opening and closing shelters in the system as well as entering the populations for open shelters at midnight. Once a shelter facility is open for operation the NSS must reflect the status change, regardless of the time of day. This allows the public to search for and locate available open shelters.

This information is collected for Red Cross managed shelters in the state using established Red Cross procedures. The status and populations of Special Needs Shelters are collected in a spreadsheet by the Florida Department of Health daily and transmitted to the Red Cross State Liaison for disposition. Shelter information on other non-Red Cross managed shelters is collected by the Red Cross from the County Emergency Operations Centers, other voluntary agencies or through other coordinated processes.

Sheltering Common Operating Picture: The state Shelter Status in Florida is available to anyone who has access to the Internet. The SERT Common Operating Picture process directs everyone to a single source for information and that source for sheltering is the state shelter status web site. The expectations for shelter reporting far exceed available resources. The shelter web site displays the state shelter status and reflects the best and most current information available at the time. The expectation is that from time to time users of the site will obtain information that conflicts with the shelter status displayed on the site.

State ESF 6 is responsible for maintaining and validating the accuracy of the site. There will always be some time lag between a change in shelter status and an update to the NSS. There is a further lag between a change in NSS and an update to the web site. Reports that conflict with the information on the site are directed to ESF 6 at the State EOC for resolution. This conflicting information is reconciled by ESF 6 staff and if the web site is shown to be incorrect then the Red Cross is notified to make the correction in NSS.

State ESF 6 has strict criteria for evaluating information concerning shelter reporting. The State has two hard and fast Rules for Shelter Reporting: 1) The current status of a shelter (Open or Closed) must be reflected in NSS, and 2) all open shelters must have current midnight population counts (a shelter population is current if the immediate prior census count time is populated in NSS).

Reports to state ESF 6 that do not violate the two Rules for Shelter Reporting will be handled by State ESF 6. Confirmed violations of the Rules will be passed to the Red Cross and the Technical Specialist reporting for SpNS. One hour will be allotted for the correction(s) to be made and placed in NSS by ARC or ARC will provide a response as to why the correction cannot be made in one hour.