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## Report Says Charities Would Be Lacking in a Big Disaster

By STEPHANIE STROM

The major charities that respond to disasters would be unable to address fully the need for food, shelter and other services after a catastrophic event like Hurricane Katrina or a major earthquake, a report by the Government Accountability Office says.

“In a worst-case, large-scale disaster, the projected need for mass care services would far exceed the capabilities of these voluntary organizations without government or other assistance,” said the G.A.O., which does research and analysis for Congress.

The report is being released on the heels of news that the American Red Cross, the only relief organization with a legally mandated responsibility to help the government provide care in an emergency, is seeking \$150 million in federal aid to cover the costs of assisting the victims of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike.

That is the largest amount the organization has ever sought from the government, and it underscores the report’s findings that the Red Cross and three other large charities — the Salvation Army, the Southern Baptist Convention and Catholic Charities — would lack the financial and other resources needed to address a Katrina-like event.

The report, commissioned by the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, found that all four charities had taken steps to address problems arising after Katrina.

For instance, the Red Cross, which came in for extensive criticism after that storm, has reorganized its chapters and worked to develop partnerships with local groups. Further, the report said, the Red Cross, the Salvation Army and the Southern Baptist Convention have worked together to develop a system to manage supplies, and local Salvation Army units have upgraded their communications systems.

But the G.A.O. determined that in a major catastrophe, they would face shortages in shelter capacity and personnel, feeding capabilities and financial resources. The Red Cross, for instance, estimated that it currently could provide shelter for only a third of the estimated 150,000 people who would need it after a terrorist nuclear attack on Washington, D.C.

“The G.A.O. is pointing out the need for continual improvements,” said Maj. George Hood, a spokesman for the Salvation Army. “Some of them, without question, will take time, effort and funding.”

Among the report's recommendations is that the [Federal Emergency Management Agency](#) develop an agreement with the Red Cross detailing that charity's responsibilities in a major disaster.