



## Georgia Emergency Operations Plan

# Emergency Support Function # 6 Annex Attachment

## *Local & State Roles & Responsibilities for Supporting Comfort Stations and Sheltering Facilities*



2015

## Coordinator and Support Agencies

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### **Coordinator**

*Local Emergency Management Agency  
Local Department of Human Services*

### **Support Agencies**

*American Red Cross  
Georgia Department of Human Services*

### **Primary Agency**

*Local Municipality/ Entity opening a  
Comfort Station*

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## 1.0 Introduction

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### 1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide clarity on the different types of facilities that may be needed to accommodate citizens during extreme weather events such as winter weather or extreme heat. This document will outline how these sites are activated and the process for transitioning individuals to a shelter. The intended audiences for this document are local and state governments; non-profit and private sector partners charged with the responsibility of identifying, activating and managing comfort stations.

### 1.2 Situation Overview

The State of Georgia is susceptible to a variety of potential severe weather episodes including, but not limited to: drought, excessive heat, hail, lightning, tornadoes, wind, flooding and extreme snow and ice. Events such as excessive heat and cold have been known to cause significant power outages. The loss of power and the extreme weather conditions could lead to both heat and cold related illnesses, necessitating the need for comfort stations such as warming/cooling centers or safe havens.

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## 2.0 Assumptions

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- During a prolonged extreme weather event, the demand on the electrical grid may exceed capacity and could result in sporadic power outages and/or major grid failure. Icing may cause downed power lines and interruption of services. Either event could result in temperature extremes where comfort stations are needed.
- Opening and operating a comfort station will be a local government decision.
- Responsibility for staffing, resources and liabilities will be that of the local jurisdiction.
- Transportation to/from the facilities will be the citizen's responsibility or that of the local jurisdiction.
- Occupants of comfort stations may need to transition to a shelter if the situation dictates (i.e.: power outages or the inability for residents to remain in their homes safely).
- If an American Red Cross Shelter is opened, staffing, resources and liability of that shelter will be the responsibility of the American Red Cross.

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## 3.0 Scope

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Extreme Heat can be defined as temperatures that hover 10 degrees or more above the average high temperature for the region and could last for several weeks. Winter storms could be snow or subfreezing temperatures, as well as strong winds, ice or heavy rain

storms. Winter storms result in extreme cold, downed power lines and blocked roads/highways.

The different facility names utilized during extreme weather events have been a source of confusion. The confusion has led to misunderstandings about types of resources and services that should be expected from the State by the local government and by the public. In order to standardize the naming of facilities that could be utilized during extreme weather events the following has been adopted:

**General Population Shelters:**

A term used to describe an American Red Cross managed or supported facility, with food, bedding, overnight accommodations, basic medical and mental health care provided for persons displaced due to an emergency or disaster.

**Independent Shelters (Good Samaritan):**

Independent shelters are facilities that are not operated or supported by the American Red Cross. Independent shelters are often managed and staffed by local government agencies or other community organizations. Liability for these facilities, staff and residents are the responsibility of the local government or operating entity.

**Comfort Station:**

A Comfort Station is designed to aid emergency managers in the accounting of personnel and individual needs. This could be by providing temporary relief from an extreme weather phenomenon such as extreme cold or heat or in determining the provision of basic life support requirements to individuals forced to relocate during a disaster or other emergent situation. The use of Comfort Stations can assist Emergency Managers in “bridging the gap” between evacuation of affected areas and the opening of a shelter as well as in smaller scale emergencies where temporary assistance is needed.

The Comfort Station will give emergency managers a controlled environment to assess the survivor’s needs (which could consist of temporary relief or in relocation to more permanent lodging). As a result, local emergency managers will be able to provide more accurate sheltering needs to state officials and volunteer organizations. Comfort Stations will be managed by the local jurisdiction, to include liability for the facility, staff and residents.

Comfort Stations could be one of the following:

**Warming Center**: A term used to describe a designated facility that can provide temporary and limited refuge from extreme cold. These facilities will be managed by the local jurisdiction, to include resources, staffing and liability for the facility.

**Cooling Center**: A term used to describe a designated facility that can provide temporary and limited refuge from extreme heat. These facilities will be managed by the local jurisdiction, to include resources, staffing and liability.

**Safe Havens (Refuge)**: These types of facilities are normally utilized when an individual is unable to get themselves to their intended destination or a designated shelter and need a place to get out of extreme weather conditions. Safe Haven facilities typically arise spontaneously as individuals seek a place that can provide immediate, limited, temporary refuge from extreme weather conditions. The decision to open a safe haven is the responsibility of the local jurisdiction or entity operating the facility. Liability, staffing and other resource support will be provided by the operating entity.

Table 1.0: *Typical Characteristics of Comfort Stations and Shelter Sites* provides an overview of the general characteristics of the different types of facilities. Note the characteristics identified are typical and there may be exceptions based on the situation and the local jurisdiction.

**Table 1.0: Typical Characteristics of Comfort Stations and Shelter Sites**

	General Population Shelter	Independent (Good Samaritan)	Cooling Center	Warming Center	Safe Haven
American Red Cross Approved Shelter	✓				
Compliant with National Standards	✓				
Listed in the National Shelter System Database	✓				
Cots Provided	✓				
Food Provided	✓				
Restroom Facilities Provided	✓				
Showers Provided	✓				
Staffed by ARC/DFCS	✓				
Meets Basic Human Needs	✓	✓			
Open over night	✓	✓		✓ *	
Provides refuge from inclement/extreme weather conditions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
American Red Cross Liability	✓				
Normally opened during the evening hours	✓	✓		✓ *	
Designated and operated by a Local Jurisdiction or Private Sector Entity			✓	✓	✓
Closes after sunset			✓ *	✓ *	✓ *

\*Based on local jurisdiction decision. Resources and support for these facilities will be provided by local jurisdictions.

## 4.0 Concept of Operations

When an extreme weather event occurs, the decision to open a comfort station (i.e. warming, cooling, safe haven) is made by the local jurisdiction or local entity. Shelters are opened at the request of the local jurisdiction in consultation with the American Red Cross (ARC). Once Independent Shelters are identified the local Emergency Management Director should ensure that they are reported to the SOC (ESF 6 – Mass Care and Human Services) for inclusion in the National Shelter System for daily reporting and when available, support purposes.

Determining to open a comfort station is never an easy decision. Some key items that may be considered when making a decision are:

- What geographical area is affected and the approximate number of citizens that could be impacted.
- Current and forecasted weather conditions.
- Road conditions and future changes that may impact the accessibility of the comfort station.
- Resource availability to include the availability of a facility near the affected area, ease of getting to the facility, capacity, staffing, hours of operation, backup power source availability and any needed resources not already available.

The local emergency management director or designee will determine the need for a Comfort Station. Decisions to open shelters will be coordinated between local EMA and Red Cross.

### 4.1 Facility Requirements

Suggested requirements for Comfort Station facilities are as follows:

*4.1.1 Life Safety/Support Requirement* – The facility should be secure, safe and sanitary; and of such size that allows survivors to safely and orderly assemble.

*4.1.2 Communication* – The facility should be equipped with “land-line” and/or cellular telephones.

*4.1.3 Food/Water* – The facility should have adequate food and water.

*4.1.4 Length of Operation* – The facility should operate for a limited time in order to assess the need for sheltering. The hours of operation are dependent upon the situation.

## 4.2 Activation

4.2.1 *Notification* – The local emergency management director or designee may decide to notify the following personnel/agencies:

- County/City Manager and/or elected officials to provide an awareness statement of the event.
- GEMA Field Coordinator
- American Red Cross (ARC) to provide an initial briefing on the potential for sheltering
- ARC will provide briefing to ESF 6 Coordinator(s) and DHS/DFCS Emergency Management Coordinators.
- Transportation providers.
- Volunteers (Receiving Staff) to report to the Comfort Station.

4.2.2 *Transportation* – The names of individuals being transported should be recorded as they load at the staging area. This list should be provided to the Receiving Staff member at the Comfort Station.

4.2.3 *Receiving* – Once residents reach the Comfort Station, Receiving Staff should complete an information sheet and identify individual needs.

4.2.4 *Needs Assessment* – Emergency managers should assess the long-term housing and life support needs of the affected individuals.

4.2.5 *Unity of Effort* – Local emergency management personnel should maintain constant coordination with local government officials, state emergency management/social service officials, and volunteer organizations.

4.2.6 *Medical* – Local Emergency Managers should consider having emergency medical personnel assigned to the Comfort Station. This is situational and resource dependent and should be coordinated at the local level.

4.2.7 *Security* – Local Emergency Managers should assess the security needs of the Comfort Station and coordinate with law enforcement as appropriate.

4.2.8 *Documentation* – Emergency management personnel should develop a system for collection, safeguarding, and storage of documents generated at the facility.

### **4.3 Deactivation**

Prior to closing a comfort station the Emergency Management Director or designee should assess the status of the remaining occupants in the comfort station and determine if they need to be transported to an American Red Cross approved shelter. Once the Comfort Station is no longer necessary emergency management personnel should return the Comfort Station to its original state based on agreement with the facility owner/operator.

## **5.0 Transitioning Individuals to a General Population Shelter**

When the decision is made that individuals in the Comfort Station may need to stay in a shelter the Emergency Management Director or designee will communicate that need to the local chapter of the American Red Cross. In collaboration they will determine what the reason is for these individuals not being able to return to the safety of their homes and the best option to accommodate their needs. If a shelter is determined to be the best option, the Emergency Management Director or designee will be responsible for coordinating any transportation needs for these individuals to the closest shelter. The ARC will shelter in accordance with their established policies and procedures.

The following steps will need to take place to transition citizens from a comfort station to a general population shelter site:

- 1) The comfort station manager or assigned staff surveys the occupants early and often to determine the potential for them to return home.
- 2) The local EMA determines that it is unsafe for the Comfort Station facility occupants to return home.
- 3) The Emergency Management Director or designee contacts the local chapter of the American Red Cross and together they make the decision to open a shelter (if one is not open already).
- 4) If a shelter is not already open the Emergency Management Director or designee and the local chapter of the American Red Cross will identify the best shelter site and timeline for when the shelter will be operational.
- 5) The Emergency Management Director or designee will coordinate any transportation needs for moving Comfort Station occupants to the designated shelter.

## **6.0 Direction, Control, and Coordination**

An extreme weather event is a dangerous situation that can bring on health emergencies in susceptible people. Individuals must be able to access comfort station resources in these

situations. Local jurisdictions should prepare to respond to these situations as needed and determine the appropriate measures to take to safeguard the citizens of their cities or county. State ESF 6 support organizations are prepared to provide assistance if requested and available. The final responsibility and liability for Comfort Stations rests on the local jurisdiction.

## 7.0 Communications

The opening of the Comfort Stations should be disseminated by local Public Information Officers through:

- Press Releases
- Local news media, commercial TV and radio
- Public Television/radio
- Local jurisdictional government Website
- Local Jurisdictional PIO
- Social media (Facebook, Twitter)
- GEMA Public Affairs
- Ready Georgia

Sample Script:

The (***Jurisdiction name***) has opened up a warming/cooling center at (***Location name***) located at (***Address***) in response to the (***type event***) we are experiencing. The facility will be open from (***hours of operation to/from***) today. This is not a shelter. The county will provide (***insert support that can be expected by the county***) at this facility. All minors must be accompanied by an adult. (***Insert appropriate protective measures winter or summer and instructions for obtaining assistance if needed.***)

## 8.0 Authorities and References

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### References

1. **Federal:**

- Comprehensive Preparedness Guide (CPG) 101: Developing and Maintaining State, Territorial, Tribal, and Local Government Emergency Plans, March 2009.
- National Incident Management System (NIMS), December 2008.
- National Response Framework, Federal Emergency Management Agency, January 2008.

2. **State:**

- Georgia Emergency Operations Plan (GEOP)
- Emergency Support Function Annex # 6: Mass Care and Human Services (2013)

3. **Local:**

- Local Emergency Operations Plans
- Inter-local agreements