



American
Red Cross

California Storms and Floods

Response Update | August 2023

At least a dozen atmospheric rivers swept across California last winter through early spring, leading to unprecedented rainfall, devastating flooding and severe weather that upended lives. Thousands of residents — many of them lower-income and immigrant farmworkers who also suffered severe setbacks to their livelihoods — were affected by the heavy rains, record snowfall and high winds.

These storms and floods also forced people from their homes. In hard-hit Monterey County, which was struck both in December and March, a levee break inundated much of the unincorporated community

of Pajaro, forcing thousands into shelters. Sadly, some displaced families will never get to return to their old homes — which were swept away, along with personal belongings, cherished memories and the vehicles they counted on to get to their jobs.

From December through March, more than **1,200 Red Cross disaster workers were on the ground across California**. They have supported safe refuge for displaced families, as well as delivering vital relief supplies, financial assistance and more to help affected individuals and families get back on their feet.



Response at a Glance*



More than **223,000**
meals and snacks
provided with partners



More than **33,100**
overnight shelter
stays with partners



More than
49,500 relief
items provided



Reached an estimated
53,700 people with relief
and recovery assistance

In Hard-Hit Pajaro, Red Cross Teams Help Displaced Families Start Anew

Following more than three months of atmospheric rivers, severe weather and destructive flooding, hundreds of Californians remained in shelters for weeks at a time. Many were not sure they would have a home when they returned. What's more, a severe shortage of affordable housing left many of these residents with few options other than staying in the shelter.

In Pajaro, most of the shelter residents came from Hispanic and agricultural communities. In addition to losing their homes, many of the shelter residents had

no work because of the flooding. Trained Red Cross Shelter Resident Transition (SRT) teams worked closely with families to help them figure out how to transition from the shelter and connect them with available resources in their community. Many families are still in contact with our teams as they continue to struggle after the floods.

"We are here for the long run," said Johann Coetzer-Liversage, a Red Cross SRT team leader. "We have to help [people who are struggling] transition back home."

*All numbers are cumulative and represent Red Cross storm and flood responses in California from December 27, 2022, to June 30, 2023.

Above: Bilingual Red Cross volunteer Edwin Gonzales travelled from his home in San Juan, Puerto Rico, to help people staying in Watsonville, California, emergency shelters find longer-term housing solutions. Photo by Jaka Vinsek/American Red Cross

Generous Donors Powered Relief and Recovery for Impacted Residents

In addition to providing casework support for some of the most vulnerable shelter residents who were having trouble returning home, compassionate Red Cross volunteers fanned out to bring essential aid directly to the most severely affected California neighborhoods and communities.

They delivered relief and cleanup supplies, meals and snacks, as well as hugs and sorely needed emotional support for families facing the overwhelming task of mucking out flood-ravaged homes and salvaging waterlogged belongings. We also provided critical financial assistance to help residents who suffered severe damage or lost their homes meet their most urgent needs. Thanks to the generosity of our donors, an estimated **53,700 individuals across California have been reached by these vital relief and recovery efforts.**

In Pajaro, displaced families were allowed to return to their homes for the first time in late March, nearly two weeks after they were forced to leave in the middle of the night, when a levee was breached and most of the town flooded. What they found wasn't pretty — mud-covered driveways and yards, a mildewed stench from water inside their homes and scattered debris.

"Every time there's a disaster — the Red Cross never fails," Gilberto Nunez told mental health volunteers after returning home to find his in-laws' home filled with muddy water. "We really appreciate the time and effort you put into the community," he told them. "You don't know how valuable it is."

Visit our [California Storms and Floods Story Map](#) for more information about our response and to learn more about some of the people we've helped.



Thank you!

The Red Cross must be ready for every disaster, big or small, and we respond to an average of more than 60,000 disasters each year — including home fires, severe weather, floods and wildfires. Those in need turn to the Red Cross in their darkest hours because they know they can depend on us right after the disaster and throughout their recovery. Your donation helps us fulfill this promise. We are grateful for your trust.

Above: Gilberto Nunez (second from right) had a smile for Red Cross volunteers who were in Pajaro as residents were finally able to return their homes, even though his in-laws' back yard dwelling had been filled with muddy water. Photo by Amy Beek/American Red Cross