

# Warming Center and Overnight Sheltering Guidance

Emergency Shelters provide a safe and secure place for individuals and families to stay before, during, and after a disaster. Sheltering can take on different forms depending on the scope, size, and possible duration of an incident. It is imperative to understand that the size and scope of the emergency will dictate what level of sheltering individuals and families in your community may be need. It may also affect what services your town or city can reasonably provide locally. During larger incidents affecting several towns in a region, the State Emergency Operations Center (or Vermont Emergency Management) in conjunction with the Vermont Agency of Human Services and the American Red Cross may open a regional shelter(s). If a local shelter is not able to be opened, and a regional shelter is being opened, this situation would call for directing residents and visitors in your community to that regional shelter. As with any emergency operation, constantly assessing needs and capabilities, as well as planning for various solutions is the path to the best possible outcome.

## **Types of Shelters and Centers**

- **Warming Center**- Is a short-term emergency shelter which allows individuals to congregate in a safe space during the day. This may be open for any incident, including when weather becomes dangerously inclement. Depending on conditions, a warming center may be all that is needed to meet the needs of your community.
- **Cooling Center**- Is a cool site or air-conditioned facility designed to provide relief and protection from heat, that are used by many communities to protect health and mitigate heat impacts during heat events, especially for high-risk populations that are disproportionately affected by extreme heat.

**For more information on hot weather preparedness, including cooling center locations around Vermont, visit: [Hot Weather | Vermont Department of Health](#)**

- **Overnight Shelter**- A safe temporary location for people affected by a disaster to stay and sleep, when staying in their home (or other lodging) is not safe or possible.

## **Fundamental Objectives of Sheltering**

- Shelters provide a safe place for individuals and families affected by a disaster to sleep or rest and may offer, among other things, food, snacks, beverages, cots, blankets, sanitation facilities, safety, first aid, cell phone charging and information on recovery efforts.
- Shelters provide services to everyone in the community.
- Shelter staff abide by principles of confidentiality when handling shelter resident information.
- Shelter staff strive to accommodate the varying cultural and faith-based preferences of the residents. Such requirements could include variations in sleeping, eating and other areas as well as the provision of space to meet and honor spiritual needs.
- As required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other civil rights laws, shelters must accommodate individuals with disabilities and those who support them. Take steps to ensure that every individual can fully use and benefit from the programs, services, activities, goods, facilities, privileges, advantages and accommodations provided by the shelter operator and their supporting agencies.
- Shelter residents who need acute health care that extends beyond the capacity of a shelter, should seek access to a medical facility.

## **Identify Sources for Potential Resources Needed to Run a Shelter**

Your shelter will need a variety of items. Identify possible shelter locations that have heat and a generator; and the sources for potential resources needed (prior to needing to open a shelter) for the following:

- Potable water
- Communications equipment: phones, computers, laptops, extension cords
- Food and food service supplies/equipment: food, plates, utensils, napkins
- Sanitation supplies/equipment: garbage bags, paper towels, cleaning supplies, mop and bucket, broom
- Children's and infants' supplies: formula, diapers, toys
- Bedding (if an overnight shelter): Universal/accessible cots, blankets, pillows
- Personal hygiene supplies: Toilet paper, paper towels, towels, feminine hygiene products, toothbrushes, toothpaste, soap, shampoo

- First aid and medical supplies: Masks, gloves, first aid kit, stop the bleed kit, Narcan (in case of overdose), sharps containers, candy bars (in case of diabetic emergency), wheelchair
- Administrative supplies
- Tables and chairs

### **Determination to Open a Local Shelter**

The decision to open a local warming or overnight shelter is up to each town or city's local emergency management team.

Reasons to open a local shelter include:

- Damaged or destroyed homes and buildings resulting in displaced individuals
- Power outages
- Freezing temperatures
- Dangerous weather or storm conditions are forecasted for your community
- Roads are damaged, destroyed or impassable due to flooding, preventing individuals and families from getting to their homes.

### **Once the Determination is Made to Open a Local Shelter**

Steps to take once the determination is made that a local shelter will be opened:

- Notify the Vermont Emergency Management Watch Officer or State Emergency Operations Center at 1-800-347-0488 that a shelter will be opening. \*If an overnight shelter, request a Vermont Division of Fire Safety inspection. More information can be found below.
- Notify 2-1-1 that the shelter is open so they can direct residents calling in to 2-1-1 to the shelter.
- Report daily, the midnight census to the VEM Watch Officer or State Emergency Operation Center by calling 1-800-347-0488.
- Let residents know the location, type (warming or overnight), and the hours the shelter will be open. There are a variety of methods to communicate this information with individuals and families. Conditions will dictate if all methods are available.
- Advise all partners once the shelter is closed.

Some notification methods include:

- Posting it at physical locations around town (a minimum of 3 physical locations are listed in the Local Emergency Management Plan that every town and city are required to maintain)
- Sending out a VT- Alert message. If the town or city is unable to send the alert, town or city officials may fill out [the alert request form](#). \*Please be aware that you must then contact the VEM Watch Officer (1-800-347-0488) after submitting this form.
- Depending on conditions and personnel available, there may be a need to go door to door in the affected areas.
- Please see your Local Emergency Management Plan for additional methods your town or city uses to communicate information to the public.

### **Shelter Inspections**

Each time a local shelter is being initially opened due to a flood or other disaster, a shelter inspection is required by the Division of Fire Safety (DFS) before sleeping may occur in that shelter.

The inspection will look at;

- Smoke detection operability
- Carbon Monoxide detection operability
- Means of egress, free and clear of obstructions
- Fire extinguishers present
- All fire protection systems are functional, if present.

During business hours you can call the nearest DFS Regional Office to schedule an inspection: <https://firesafety.vermont.gov/staff-contact> . After hours, if or you are unable to reach the DFS Regional Office, you will need to call the VEM Watch Officer Hotline 1-800-347-0488 to request a DFS shelter inspection.

The Division of Fire Safety will then notify the local fire department and EMS that a shelter is in operation in their jurisdiction.

### **Other Considerations**

- Having a space (preferably separate) for pets. Not allowing a person to be able to bring their pet(s) with them to the shelter often results in them choosing not to use the shelter and instead staying in unsafe conditions to be with their pet(s).

- When a shelter is sited under a local emergency plan, the municipality should work with the Agency of Human Services, the American Red Cross, and community-based emergency or charitable food providers <https://vem.vermont.gov/programs/emd/partners>, to assess the facility and the facility's potential operations, including the characteristics of the surrounding area during an all-hazards event, multiple routes of travel and possible hazards that could prevent access to the shelter, and the need for immediate and sustained access to food and water for individuals using the shelter.
- Have a space and a plan to separate those who are sick from the general population of the shelter.
- Adequate staffing should be available to ensure the shelters ability to address the possible need to separate shelter occupants into separate populations (for example male, female and families).
- If additional resources are needed, such as cots, they can be requested from the American Red Cross or Agency of Human Services through the VEM Watch Officer or State Emergency Operations Center 1-800-347-0488. Please note that depending on the situation, it is not guaranteed that those requests will be able to be filled.
- If you are unable to open a local shelter and are relying on a regional shelter, please consider what resources are available locally to transport individuals unable to transport themselves to the regional shelter.

### **Having a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)**

Having a Memorandum of Understanding with facilities that will be used as a local shelter is the best practice, meant to add clarity for all parties. Any MOU that is created should be reviewed annually with all parties to ensure that the information is still accurate.

Here are items to consider including as part of the MOU:

- Primary 24-hour point of contact for access to the building (name and phone#).
- Who is responsible for cleaning the facility while open and once closed (supplies and people).
- Who is responsible for replacing or reimbursing disposable goods used (paper towels, toilet paper, plates, silverware, napkins).
- Who is responsible for replacing or reimbursing fuel used to heat the facility or run the generator.
- How will damage to the facility that occurs while the shelter is open be covered?

- Food services- define if use of kitchen and food supplies on hand may be used to help run the shelter.
- Appropriate places for parking.
- Are pets allowed?

It is a best practice to have the shelter manager and facility point of contact conduct a condition of facility walk-through prior to opening and after closing.

### **Links to Additional Sheltering Resources**

- **Animal Resources During an Emergency**

This form allows you to gather all animal resources on one document, so during a disaster you can address more easily the needs for sheltering and caring for various types of animals: [Animal Resources During an Emergency](#)

- **Hot Weather Resources**

This link is to the Vermont Department of Health's webpage for hot weather resources and includes a list of cooling sites around Vermont when open.

[Vermont Department of Health Hot Weather Webpage](#)

- **American Red Cross Shelter Fundamentals Course**

Is a basic level course that introduces the roles and responsibilities for opening, operating and closing a shelter during a disaster. The course focuses on what new shelter workers need to know to work in a shelter.

To access/ register for online training modules provided by the Red Cross:

- Go to \* [http://bit.ly/ext\\_register](http://bit.ly/ext_register) and complete the required registration.
- \*If the above link does NOT work TYPE in this link in your browser [http://bit.ly/ext\\_register](http://bit.ly/ext_register) (do not copy & paste)
- Enter Disaster Function in the Division Box
- Choose Northern New England Region from the Region Name dropdown menu.
- Enter your agency name.

After registration, you can access EDGE at: <https://arc.csod.com> (will say Cornerstone until you log in)

If you have problems connecting with the above link, type the link in your browser and do not copy and paste.

Once you have registered:

- a. Enter Shelter Fundamentals in the search bar to bring up that course request.
- b. Be sure to request the online web training (there is a blue computer icon) and not the instructor led class training.

- **FEMA Shelter Field Guide**

\*A wealth of information on sheltering can also be found in the **FEMA Shelter Field Guide**: [Shelter Field Guide FEMA P-785](#)

- **Using Federal Child Nutrition Programs for Emergency Feeding**: This video discusses resources that may be available to provide meals at shelters though existing school resources: [Federal Child Nutrition Programs for Emergency Feeding- Video](#)