

News Release

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Oregon Department of Human Services to assume direct management of wildfire sheltering mission on Dec. 31, 2020

(Salem, Ore.) – On Dec. 31, 2020, the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) will assume day-to-day management of shelter for people impacted by the September wildfires. This work is currently being done through a contract by the American Red Cross, which has been sheltering thousands of Oregonians displaced by the fires since September.

“The wildfires impacted large areas of the state at once. The willingness of the Red Cross to provide shelter for many months throughout the state, and their extensive experience, was invaluable,” said ODHS Director Fariborz Pakseresht. “Additionally, the hotels that provide the rooms are essential to keeping people sheltered. We thank them all for their important work.”

Under Oregon’s Emergency Operations Plan, ODHS is responsible for supporting the sheltering (mass care), feeding, emergency assistance, and human services needs of people impacted by disasters. In this role, ODHS coordinates efforts among local and Tribal governments, and other nongovernmental organizations.

“As we at ODHS take responsibility from the Red Cross, we remain committed to ensuring each person impacted by the September Oregon wildfires has access to temporary shelter and three meals per day,” Pakseresht said.

The American Red Cross took on emergency shelter functions following the wildfires. In October, ODHS contracted with the Red Cross to continue shelter management through the end of the year.

“Amid Oregon’s historic wildfires, more than 1,000 Red Cross volunteers from across the region and the country came to the aid of our fellow Oregonians,” American Red Cross Cascades Region Chief Executive Officer Dale Kunce said. “Together with our local, state and community partners and through the generosity

of our donors, the Red Cross was committed to delivering its mission of preventing and alleviating human suffering.”

People staying in the shelters were notified of the change as their food was delivered over the weekend. ODHS also provides meals to people in shelter.

At its peak in October, more than 2,000 people were sheltering in 79 hotels. As of Dec. 14, 1,023 people are sheltering in 558 rooms at 54 hotels throughout the state.

ODHS is securing staff to be shelter liaisons replacing the Red Cross staff and volunteers. Each staff person will have a portfolio of about five hotels in their geographic vicinity. They will be the main contact for each person in shelter as well as the hotels and will visit with people regularly.

“In addition to the local staff, we are building our resources and connections to identify what needs to happen for each person to successfully transition out of shelter and into permanent housing,” Ed Flick, ODHS emergency management director said.

“We recognize that the transition from shelter to housing will be challenging due to the long-term housing crisis,” Flick said. “We are actively working with counties and Oregon Housing and Community Services to assist people in their transition to housing as it becomes available.”

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