

DRF helping carriers affected by L.A. fires

The devastating wildfires in Los Angeles continued to rage as this issue went to press in mid-January. According to news reports, at least 24 people had died, 23 others were missing and thousands had been evacuated. The largest of the fires destroyed nearly the entire Pacific Palisades neighborhood and consumed 37 square miles. More than 12,000 structures have burned down in the area, leaving untold numbers of people homeless.

In all, 150,000 people in Los Angeles County had been ordered to evacuate. Some took refuge in nine emergency shelter sites in the area. Firefighting crews from California and eight other states, joined by crews from Mexico and Canada, had responded. More than 14,000 firefighters using 1,300 fire engines and 84 aircraft were battling the blazes.

The devastation was expected to continue as Santa Ana winds up to 70 mph were forecast. Not only did emergency personnel have to contain spreading fires, they needed to respond to any new fires that popped up, complicating their efforts.

With such a large disaster unfolding, letter carriers already have been affected. The NALC Disaster Relief Foundation (DRF) is contacting affected carriers and providing assistance.

“We know that multiple carriers have lost everything in the fires,” DRF President Christina Vela Davidson said, while others had to evacuate from their homes, she said. “We are working through the local branches to find and reach out to any carriers who need help.” About 80 carriers were displaced from their homes by evacuation; at least 11 of them had homes that were destroyed.

Fortunately, DRF isn’t aware of any carriers or carriers’ family members killed or injured.

Of course, postal operations are affected by the fires. Some postal facilities were damaged, delivery is suspended to affected areas, firefighting crews have blocked access to some roads and smoke is a hazard for carriers working outside. USPS and NALC are working to ensure that carriers remain safe on the job.

The Postal Record will provide a new report about this disaster in the next issue.

In the meantime, NALC members can help their fellow carriers in crisis by supporting the Disaster Relief Foundation.

The foundation identifies carriers who are affected by disasters and disseminates aid as soon as possible. The aid can include emergency grants or supplies such as water, food, clothing and postal uniform items. Working closely with local branch leaders, DRF also helps NALC members whose homes are uninhabitable by offering emergency grants so a member might be able to find temporary housing or transportation, as well as helping them apply for additional grant funds once the weather clears and they are able to assess their damage.

Grants are provided for property damage sustained to a primary residence, automobile or personal property from causes such as hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, earthquakes or severe storms, along with wildfires, and are provided only to NALC members.



Firefighters battle the Palisades fire in Los Angeles in January.

Members do not have to wait for emergency relief or insurance claims to be settled to apply. Applications must be received within 120 days from the date of the natural disaster, unless the applicant can provide sufficient reasons for a delay. The application for a relief grant is on the foundation’s website, nalc.org/disaster.

The foundation relies on donations from NALC members. Every penny of donations to DRF go directly to individual carriers or branches needing assistance—no administrative costs are deducted.

“Your donations are helping NALC members in the path of the wildfires who receive assistance to get back on their feet quickly,” NALC President Brian L. Renfroe said. “Please give to DRF to help them get through this crisis.”

Donations can be sent to: NALC Disaster Relief Foundation, 100 Indiana Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-2144; or made by credit card at nalc.org/ndrfdonate. The foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization; contributions to DRF may be tax-deductible. It is recommended that you consult your tax advisor. **PR**