

***Statement to ARRL from Laura Howe, Director,  
Response Communication and Marketing, American Red Cross***

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Earlier this year the American Red Cross instituted a background check policy for all employees and volunteers. Background checks have been an area of focus at the Red Cross for many years but it was not until the 2005 hurricane season that our weakness in this area was exposed, as evidenced by publicized examples of fraud and waste.

Some volunteers have raised concerns about the consent form which all employees and volunteers are required to sign to initiate a background check. The consent form, which is a standard form based on federal and state fair credit reporting acts, contains standard legal language used by both non-profit and for-profit organizations for background checks. By signing the consent form, it is true that the person does agree that the Red Cross *has the right to* conduct a credit check or other investigation into an individual's background; however, it is only in a *rare applicable circumstance* that the Red Cross will actually run a credit check. Instances when a credit check may be warranted include, but are not limited to, when a unit is hiring someone to work with finances or fundraising or when an individual is suspected of a theft, fraud or other crime related to his or her activities with the Red Cross. While the Red Cross will never run a credit check on the vast majority of its employees and volunteers, it is important that this standard language is included in the consent form to protect our clients, volunteers and employees.

The Red Cross realizes some volunteers may have concerns about authorizing a credit check. Those concerns are understandable. But please rest assured that credit checks are only run in rare instances and are not a part of the routine minimum basic check the

Red Cross performs on employees or volunteers. The standard minimum check includes only a social security number verification and a search of the National Criminal File for the past seven years (from the date of release from prison or probation, whichever occurs later). If a volunteer has questions about whether their chapter would need to conduct an additional check besides the standard, those questions should be directed to the particular Unit Administrator.

The Red Cross certainly values its employees and volunteers and our background check process is not intended to be a burden to those who play a vital role in our relief efforts. We believe that in order to maintain the trust of the American people and provide them with the best quality service, all Red Cross employees and volunteers must undergo background checks according to standards being implemented across the entire organization. While this initiative does bring major change and will require many long-time Red Crossers to undergo background checks, it is a positive action that will benefit each of us, bring consistency to our background check policy and signal our organization's commitment to its customers and donors. When a victim of a house fire or a hurricane needs help, they'll know they can trust a Red Crosser. Donors will be confident that when they give to the Red Cross, their blood or money is protected. And when an individual makes a decision to volunteer or work for the Red Cross, they'll know they are in trusted company.