

## DISASTER RESPONSE PLAN (NATURAL DISASTERS)

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### GENERAL INFORMATION

Texas Lawyers Care Department (TLC) and the Director of Communications will take the lead in implementing a plan to provide disaster relief in the form of legal assistance to victims of natural disasters. Texas Lawyers Care will coordinate the compilation or updating of training materials on legal issues commonly faced by disaster victims and will coordinate recruitment of attorney volunteers to respond to telephone calls to a special State Bar toll-free 800-number dedicated to disaster victim calls (the A hotline®). The Director of Communications will be the contact with the Governor's office and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in coordinating Bar activities with state and federal relief efforts. The Director of Communications will coordinate announcements of the hotline numbers and TLC will provide FEMA with the required statistics. FEMA reimburses the Bar for the cost of the toll-free hotline but not staff time. Hotline costs should include the out-of-pocket costs of recruiting volunteers and necessary communications with them.

In consultation with the President, Executive Director, Director of Communications and local groups, Texas Lawyers Care determines the extent of the need for volunteer lawyers. In the case of disasters affecting a large population, blast faxes are sent on behalf of the President and/or Section chairs requesting assistance from members, certain groups of members, or local bar associations.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

Volunteer attorney training materials  
Prepared public service announcements  
Sample press release

### PROCEDURES FOR RESPONDING TO DISASTERS

1. Texas Lawyers Care confers with the SBOT President, Executive Director, and Director of Communications to begin disaster response effort.
2. Director of Communications calls the Governor's office to find out what Texas counties are affected and if any have been requested to be declared disaster areas.
3. Director of Communications contacts FEMA to find out what counties are declared to be disaster areas and reports findings to TLC.
4. Texas Lawyers Care checks with local bars and/or local legal services providers in the affected area to find out extent of damage, if they need help with dealing with victims' needs, etc.
5. Texas Lawyers Care recruits volunteer lawyers by sending blast faxes from SBOT President or section chairs to relevant groups with request for their pro bono assistance. (See Appendix A: Sample Blast Fax.) Assistance consists primarily of answering telephone questions. If the need arises, volunteers may be called upon to go on-site to provide legal assistance, at a

centralized disaster aid office. Assistance may also involve document preparation or legal representation if it is done strictly on a pro bono basis and does not involve a position adverse to FEMA.

6. Texas Lawyers Care sets up a database of volunteer attorneys who have responded to requests for help.
7. Texas Lawyers Care makes volunteer lawyers aware of training materials available. Send Legal Assistance After a Natural Disaster Training Materials (or appropriate excerpt) to volunteer lawyers if needed or requested.
8. Communications Department sets up telephone hotline at the State Bar of Texas.
  - Ⓒ Coordinate with Assistant Manager of Purchasing and Facilities to have phone system put in place.
  - Ⓒ Texas Lawyers Care records messages in English and Spanish for the phone system. (See Appendix B: Sample Script.)
9. The Director of Communications coordinates the dissemination of press releases and public service announcements with the President, Executive Director and TLC.
10. Director of Communications recruits staff to assist with answering hotline or finds a department to handle it.
  - Ⓒ Identify who is responsible for delivering Intake Forms twice (or more) daily to TLC.
  - Ⓒ For big disasters try to find volunteers from outside the Bar staff.
11. Texas Lawyers Care staff trains volunteer staff on intake procedures. (See Appendix C: Intake Procedure.)
12. Volunteer staff will document each call that comes in on a Telephone Intake Form. (See Appendix D: Intake Form)
13. For each request for help, Texas Lawyers Care staff calls volunteer attorneys until one is identified who is able to contact the victim within two business days.
14. Texas Lawyers Care staff faxes the completed Intake Form to the attorney. (See Appendix E: Fax Cover Sheet.)
  - Ⓒ File original Intake Form in pending file.
  - Ⓒ Each day, update the database with the number of calls each attorney accepts.

15. The volunteer lawyer responds to the caller within 48 hours and answers his/her questions or makes referral for further legal services.
16. The volunteer lawyer faxes the Intake Form back to TLC with case notes and any follow-up required.
17. Texas Lawyers Care staff checks the pending file each day.
  - C If the volunteer lawyer hasn't faxed the results back within 72 hours, TLC calls the lawyer to see if he/she has contacted the caller.
  - C If staff is unable to reach the volunteer lawyer, staff calls the victim to see if they have been assisted.
  - C If the victim has not received assistance from the volunteer lawyer, repeat from Step 12.
18. Texas Lawyers Care compiles the statistics on how many calls were received and how many resolved and forwards the information to the FEMA representative in Texas on a weekly basis. (See Appendix F: Sample Report to FEMA.)
19. Texas Lawyers Care and the Director of Communications report regularly to the SBOT President, Executive Director, and relevant division heads on status of the project. When that group agrees that circumstances warrant closing the project, that is done. At the conclusion of the project, Texas Lawyers Care and the Director of Communications submit a final response report to the President and the Executive Director summarizing the results of the project and informing them of any problems encountered.
20. The Communications Director files the request with FEMA for reimbursement of hotline expenses.
21. Texas Lawyers Care will retain records of the project for a period of \_\_\_\_\_ years following completion of the project.
22. At the conclusion of the project, Texas Lawyers Care will review the case notes and categorize the types of legal issues presented. Texas Lawyers Care will summarize the responses and issues for future use in training materials.
23. Periodically, Texas Lawyers Care will enlist the assistance of Section Chairs and/or other volunteer lawyers or groups to update training materials.

## Appendix A: Sample Blast Fax

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# STATE BAR OF TEXAS

### URGENT PLEA FOR DISASTER ASSISTANCE

**DATE:** AUGUST 26, 1998  
**TO:**  
**FROM:** RICHARD PENA, PRESIDENT

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Tropical Storm Charley's heavy rains have caused severe flooding in South Texas and along the Rio Grande River, devastating the homes and lives of thousands of Texans. The hardest hit communities are among the poorest in the country.

The State Bar of Texas, through its Disaster Response Committee, has organized volunteer attorneys to provide legal advice and assistance to those victimized by disasters that have hit our state in recent years. Once again we are faced with that challenge. Volunteers are needed for three kinds of service:

- (1) return calls from victims who call the State Bar disaster hotline;
- (2) pro bono representation in matters related to the flood (may be partly on-site);
- (3) join a team of volunteers traveling to the site for several days to provide legal advice and assistance (training provided).

If you can help, please fill out the form below and return it to the State Bar as soon as possible. Spanish speaking ability will be helpful but not required. If you have questions, please call our pro bono office, Texas Lawyers Care, (800)204-2222, ext. 2155.

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Name:

Address:

Phone:

Fax:

E-mail:

**Spanish speaking:**     No     Yes    **If yes:**     Fair     Good     Fluent

**I agree to help with the following:**

Disaster Hotline

Pro Bono Representation

On-site Assistance

**I have expertise in the following areas:**

Consumer

Immigration

Powers of Attorney

Real Estate

Employment

Insurance

Probate

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Health Care

Landlord/Tenant

Public Benefits

Debtor / Creditor

Family Law

**Please fax to Texas Lawyers Care at (512) 477-8302 or E-mail to: [prangel@texasbar.com](mailto:prangel@texasbar.com)**

**Appendix B**

**PROPOSED SCRIPT FOR FLOOD VICTIMS LEGAL LINE**

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**1-800-504-7030**

Press 1 to continue in English.  
Para Espanol, oprima el numero 2.

#1

Welcome to the State Bar of Texas disaster assistance hotline.

If you are a victim of the Rio Grande flood and have legal concerns, a volunteer lawyer will be glad to call you back with advice. A lawyer will return your call as soon as possible. This service is free. When you hear the tone at the end of this message, please leave your name, home county, day and evening telephone numbers, and a brief description of your legal problem. Please speak slowly and clearly, and include the area code with each phone number. Thank You.

#2

Bienvenidos a la linea de ayuda legal de la Barra de Abogados de Tejas

Si usted tiene problemas legales relacionados a la inundacion del Rio Grande, un abogado esta dispuesto a regresar su llamada lo mas pronto posible para darle consejo legal. Este servicio es gratuito. Cuando escuche la señal al final de este recado, haga favor de dejar su nombre, condado, sus numeros telefónicos de día y de noche, y una breve explicacion de su problema legal. Haga favor de hablar despacio y claro, y ponga la clave de area con cada numero de telefono. Gracias.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

The Communications Department sets up the telephone hotline at the State Bar of Texas. The Director of Communications coordinates with Assistant Manager of Purchasing and Facilities to have phone system put in place. Texas Lawyers Care Department staff records messages in English and Spanish for the phone system. The Director of Communications will recruit staff to assist with answering hotline or finds a department to handle it. For big disasters, volunteers will be recruited from outside the Bar staff.

**MATERIALS NEEDED**

- Intake Forms
- Calls Taken box
- Fax Cover Sheets for various counties
- Volunteer Database
- Pending file

**RECEIVING CALLS**

1. Designated SBOT staff or volunteers answer calls in Hotline Center as they occur.
2. For each call received, complete an Intake Form with the information needed.
3. Place completed Intake Forms in the Calls Taken box.

**INTAKE FORMS PROCESSED**

4. Designate a person to pick-up intake forms from Hotline Center throughout the day and take to TLC office.
5. Texas Lawyers Care staff assistant receives the Intake Forms and distributes to the TLC attorneys for initial contact and identification of client's problem.
6. The contact person identifies the problem by case type, using the areas of expertise listed below, and assigns it to the next available attorney on the volunteer list.  
AREAS OF EXPERTISE: 3Consumer 3Immigration 3Powers of Attorney 3Real Estate  
3Employment 3Insurance 3Probate 3Landlord/Tenant 3Other
7. Update the "No. of Cases Taken" column on the volunteer list database. (See Sample Database Printout.)

8. Once the volunteer attorney is designated, the contact person calls the attorney to confirm availability and prepares a fax cover sheet according to county.
  - C Be sure to initial fax **cover sheet when finished faxing.**
9. Give Intake Form, with fax **cover sheet stapled to the back of it**, to TLC staff assistant for entering/updating the database with the number of cases assigned to the attorney.
10. Staff assistant files the Intake Form and fax sheet in the Pending file and checks the dates on the pending Intake Forms.
  - C If a sent Intake Form is still pending after 72 hours, call the volunteer attorney to see if he/she has contact the caller.
  - C If unable to reach the volunteer lawyer, call the victim to see if they have been assisted.
  - C if the victim has not received assistance from the volunteer lawyer, repeat from Step 6.
11. Staff assistant will update, print and distribute volunteer lists from the database periodically.

**INTAKE FORMS RETURNED BY ATTORNEY**

12. Staff assistant gives Intake Forms that are returned by the attorney to initial contact for review.
13. Initial contact reviews Intake Form and files in the "Completed Intakes" folder.
  - C Be sure to pull and discard **the pending copy.**

PLEASE PRINT

Intake Operators=Name:	Intake Date:	9 Voice mail message Date recorded:
Name of Client:  Birthdate:	9 Spanish speaking 9 English speaking 9 Other _____	County:
Daytime Telephone:  Best time to call:	Evening Telephone:  Best time to call:	
Current Address: (Street, City, County, Zip Code)	Pre-Disaster Address: (Street, City, County, Zip Code)	
Client's Description of Problem		
<p><b><i>This Portion For Attorney Use Only:</i></b>    Legal Problem - Advice Provided</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Referrals Provided</p>		
Attorney Name (type or print):	Date:	

Attorneys, please return to Texas Lawyers Care by fax to 1-512-477-8302 or mail to P.O. Box 12487, Austin, TX 78711-2487 Telephone: 1-800-204-2222, extention 2155

## Appendix E: Sample Fax Cover Sheet

# STATE BAR OF TEXAS

### TEXAS LAWYERS CARE

FAX NO: 512/477-8302

## FAX COVER SHEET

TO:

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

SUBJECT: Telephone Intake Forms, Disaster Legal Services  
Brazoria, Burleson, Colorado, Fort Bend, Harris, Montgomery, Galveston & Wharton.

COMMENTS: Pursuant to our telephone conversation I am sending you intake form(s) regarding flood victim(s) who need legal advice. Please call the victim(s) within two business days. Complete the form(s), and return to us at your earliest convenience.

If the client needs continuing representation please refer him/her to Gulf Coast Legal Foundation at 713-652-5911 (Monday - Thursday, 9:00 a.m. - Noon). If the matter is obviously a fee generating case (e.g. personal injury) then please refer the client to the local Lawyer Referral Services: Harris Bar Association at 713-236-8000. Also, the Houston Bar Association offers Spanish-speaking service and low fee panel, serving Harris, Montgomery, Fort Bend, Brazoria and Galveston counties) at 1-800-289-4577 or 713-237-9247. For Burleson, Colorado and Wharton, please refer fee-generating cases to the State Bar Lawyer Referral Service at 1-800-252-9690.

#### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- \$ FEMA Teleregistration: 1-800-462-9029 [Hearing-impaired: 1-800-462-7587]
- \$ FEMA Disaster Assistance Helpline (information on pending applications) 1-800-525-0321
- \$ Texas Attorney General's Consumer Protection hotline: 1-800-337-3928
- \$ Texas Department of Insurance disaster information line: 1-800-578-4677

Thank You.

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