

Houston Employee Response Team

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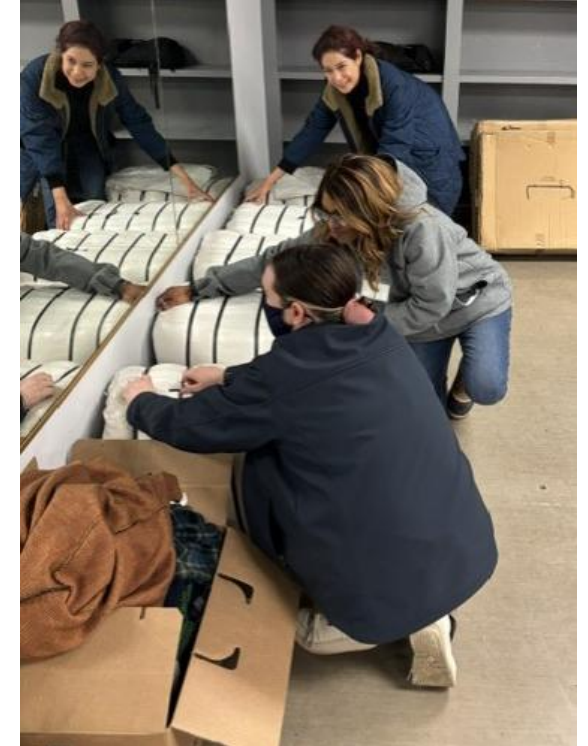




Houston Employee Response Team (HERT)

Building Citywide Workforce Response Readiness

- Mission
- History & Evolution
- AP-2-24
- HERT Structure
- Blue Sky Readiness
- HERT Activation
- Next Steps





What is the HERT?

Building Citywide Workforce Response Readiness

The **Houston Employee Response Team** strategy is to provide aid in the aftermath of disasters in coordination with the Office of Emergency Management and other City of Houston departments.

HERT Provides:

- Pool of trained City employees
- Support in disaster response
- Structured process for employee assignment and communication
- City wide workforce coordination under the City's emergency- management structure





Why HERT?

Disasters can create workforce needs beyond normal department capacity

- Piloted during Winter Storm Fern 2026
- Open and staff emergency facilities
- Support cooling/warming centers, Point of Distribution Sites
- Provide logistical and administrative support at Houston Emergency Center
- Assist with recovery operations





History of HERT

From concept to City-wide strategy

The Gap

Prior to 2021, the City had no mechanism to train and utilize non-Tier 1 employees

2021

HERT concept created to address the need for additional staffing during disaster events

Challenges with volunteers

Availability
Training
Safety and Liability
Accountability

2026

Moved to Department of Neighborhoods, City wide policy established, Implemented HERT training standards





AP 2-24: A Sustainable Response

Formalizing HERT as a City-wide workforce capability

- Signed by Mayor John Whitmire on June 2, 2026
- Applies to severe weather and other emergency conditions
- Departments identify 8.5% of Tier II and Tier III staff assigned for one year HERT assignments
- Departments designate a Point of Contact to support HERT coordinators during activations
- HERT staff will be trained to ensure safety and responsibilities during activations
- HERT staff remain on their Department's payroll with existing pay and benefits





Blue Sky Days

Readiness happens before an emergency

- Identify HERT Department Points of Contact and assigned rosters
- Confirm one-year assignments
- Provide training and orientation
- Review roles, responsibilities, and expectations
- Identify potential assignments
- Conduct communication and readiness checks
- Maintain workforce readiness and preparedness





Readiness and Training

Building a trained workforce across City departments

Departments Trained:

DON
ARA
OBO
LGL
GSD
MCD
HPL

Training Partnerships:

The American Red Cross
OEM
Houston Health Department

Additional training
opportunities will expand
readiness

As of August 2026
COH has ~150 trained
HERT staff ready to
respond





HERT Activation

Activation timelines vary based on the type and nature of the disaster

Time Before Landfall — Employee Actions

<i>-120 Hours</i>	<i>Initial email alert; potential activation.</i>
<i>-96 Hours</i>	<i>Receive updated information on conditions and expectations.</i>
<i>-72 Hours</i>	<i>Team briefing; prepare home, family, and personal needs.</i>
<i>-48 Hours</i>	<i>Return to normal duties unless otherwise instructed.</i>
<i>-24 Hours</i>	<i>Official activation notice issued.</i>



HERT Activation

- Receive activation notification from OEM
- Coordinators will be stationed at the Houston Emergency Center
- Begin notifying HERT staff of activation and deployment assignments
- Provide Just-in-Time training refresher
- HERT Coordinators provide centralized workforce coordination and support
- Maintain communication with deployed staff and provide 24-hr support during activations





Winter Storm Fern January 2026

HERT's pilot activation demonstrated the value of a coordinated workforce

Weekend 1 (Jan 24-27)

23°F

- 54 DON staff deployed
- 12 warming centers
- Provided support 4 days –12 hr shifts
- Day and overnight support
- HERT coordinators on call 24hrs
- **Approximately 1314 residents served**



Weekend 2 (Jan 30-Feb 1)

29°F

- 25 staff deployed across DON, HPL, HPW, GSD, and ARA
- 4 warming centers
- Provided support 2 days –12 hr shifts
- Day and overnight support
- HERT coordinators on call 24hrs
- **Approximately 632 residents served**

Pilot result: HERT provided additional personnel capacity during a sustained winter weather event.



Next Steps

Continue building HERT into a sustainable citywide capability

- Continue training remaining departments
- Purchase HERT high visibility vests and PPE
- Expand training partnerships with City Departments and other community partners
- Researching centralized mass notification platform
- Develop recognition and incentives for HERT staff





DEPARTMENT OF **NEIGHBORHOODS**

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