

THE CHRONICLE OF PHILANTHROPY

The Newspaper of the Nonprofit World

September 18, 2003 • \$4

TECHNOLOGY

New Software Aims to Speed Relief Efforts

AFTER A DISASTER, one of the biggest challenges relief organizations face is getting supplies to where they are needed, often under chaotic circumstances. New software aims to streamline that task by connecting all the players in the supply chain.

The Fritz Institute, a San Francisco nonprofit organization, has spent more than \$1-million to develop Humanitarian Logistics Software, in coordination with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, in Geneva. The online system is designed to let relief organizations solicit and compare bids for needed supplies, place orders, track shipments, keep track of inventory, and record donations.

"Information in an emergency tends to be fragmented; it tends to be in pieces," says Lynn C. Fritz, founder of the Fritz Institute. Too often, he says, workers in the field don't know exactly what supplies their organizations' headquarters have ordered, how much to expect, or when the materials are scheduled to arrive. Such unknowns make it difficult to plan relief efforts effectively. By bringing together all the steps of the procurement process in a single system, he says,

relief workers can get a better sense of the big picture, whether they are at a headquarters site or in a disaster zone.

Suppliers that the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have worked with during past disasters are connected to the system, and employees can view what items those companies have in stock, their cost, and even where the items are located.

Bernard Chomilier, the Red Cross federation's head of logistics, says that the software will give people working at disaster sites more time to do the "real work" of providing relief, such as setting up warehouses and getting supplies to the people who need them, instead of making myriad phone calls to try to figure out what materials are supposed to be coming and then letting headquarters know what actually arrives.

The federation has installed the software in its Geneva office, and plans to have it running in all its field offices by the end of next year. In the meantime, the Fritz Institute plans to make the software available free to other relief organizations.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Go to <http://www.fritzinstitute.org>.