

American Red Cross in Greater New York Uses Reflective Vests From Head Lites and 3M; Vests Help Identify Responders During Emergencies

The American Red Cross in Greater New York (ARC/GNY) recently received a shipment of 450 high-visibility vests for their emergency response teams to wear during disaster responses.

ARC/GNY acquired Vis-Tac load-bearing and Vis-Mat nonload-bearing vests made with 3M Scotchlite reflective material from Head Lites Corp., a supplier of safety apparel. Load-bearing vests accommodate attachable pockets to hold critical equipment; nonload bearing are lighter weight and have no attachable pockets.

ARC/GNY teamed with Head Lites shortly after Scott Graham took over as chief response officer for the chapter and recognized the need for reflective garments.

"The Disaster Response Team reported at 2 a.m. to a four-alarm house fire in Queens that was situated on a narrow residential street," Graham recalled. "The team wasn't wearing any reflective vests while unloading supplies from the van as a speeding driver headed recklessly in their direction. One of our crew was nearly struck in this low-visibility situation. We were very fortunate no one was injured that night."

Graham says procuring reflective vests was a necessary change and safety was a major consideration. "The vests that our people were using didn't have any reflectivity. I couldn't see where our people were and neither could anyone else, including other first-responders and passing motorists," said Graham. "Even on off streets and roadways, visibility is important for the response team, which frequently operates in noisy, crowded, low-light situations where visual identification is critical," he continued.

The Red Cross response team members who care for victims, provide hydration to firefighters, police officers and other responders, distribute clean-up kits, and offer other mass care, wear the nonload bearing vests. "These people need better visibility and recognition," explained Gary Lesley, president of St. Paul, Minn.-based Head Lites. "For their vests, we stress lightweight and durable construction."

The Red Cross leadership team wears the load-bearing vests, which are equipped with attachable pockets and reflective badges. The reflective badges identify the leadership team to victims, other responders and each other. "As soon as I arrive on the scene, I can easily discern who's providing mass care and who's in the leadership," Graham said.

The attachable pockets turn the Vis-Tac vests from a garment into a tool for holding cell phones, two-way radios, PDAs, flashlights and other equipment. This keeps responders' hands free - particularly important when working at an incident site where responders are taking down information; communicating; and passing out blankets, water or other supplies.

The design of the load-bearing vests allows each Red Cross team member to customize the position of each piece of equipment, according to his or her responsibilities.

"The appearance and comfort of caregivers also is extremely important," said Lesley. "People in such situations need a professional look that reassures the victims," he explained.

About Head Lites

Head Lites Corp. is a St. Paul, Minn.-based designer and manufacturer of high-visibility personal protective

equipment (PPE) for the workplace. For more information, visit www.headlitescorp.com.

About the American Red Cross in Greater New York

Now in its 100th year, the American Red Cross helps people in New York City and four adjacent counties avoid, prepare for and respond to emergencies. ARC/GNY provides immediate aid to those affected by more than 3,000 emergencies a year -- from fires and water main breaks to building collapses and blackouts. The Red Cross also helps New Yorkers stay prepared for emergencies by offering hundreds of health and safety courses on such subjects as First Aid, Disaster Preparedness, Swim Safety and Adult/Child CPR throughout the region. For more information, call 1-877 RED-CROSS or visit www.nyredcross.org.

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