



PREPARING FOR IMPACT

“For I was *hungry* and you gave me something to eat; I was *thirsty* and you gave me something to drink...” MATTHEW 25:35 (CSB)

Recently, feeding volunteers with SBC of Virginia Disaster Relief partnered with the City of Suffolk for a community-wide sheltering drill designed to test the city’s emergency response systems.

While it was only a simulation, the volunteers’ work was very real, preparing meals, coordinating service flow, and supporting first responders, shelter staff, and evaluators on site.

The drill provided a valuable opportunity for the Disaster Relief feeding team. Shawn Ames, Relief Ministries Coordinator, highlighted the significance of this type of training:

“SBCV Disaster Relief exists to send help, healing, and hope to those impacted by disasters, and readiness is vital. Drills such as this allow volunteers to work in a realistic environment without the pressures of an actual crisis.”

These experiences strengthen confidence, reinforce teamwork, and offer new volunteers a sense of what deployment can feel like. Volunteer Clay Bernick, from **First Baptist Church of Norfolk**, reflected, “I found the most valuable parts of the drill were fellowship with other team members and interacting with other relief organizations.”

David Jones, a volunteer from **BridgePoint Church** in Gloucester, added “I am thankful for the opportunity to learn the ropes in a realistic but low-stakes training scenario.”

The exercise also allowed SBCV Disaster Relief to evaluate its equipment and systems. Setting up in a live environment helps identify improvements in workflow, equipment readiness, communication, and coordination. Linda Wallace, member at **Oak Grove Baptist Church** in Colonial Beach and SBCV State Feeding Coordinator, explained, “It’s one thing to read about it on paper but another thing to operate in real life.”

Wallace continued, “It is important to maintain connections with partner agencies so responders know who they can call on in a disaster and what they can expect from us.” Steven Bilski, Coastal Community Disaster Specialist for the American Red Cross, added, “It’s a way we can build trust and capability.”

Ames noted, “There are 138 counties and independent cities in Virginia. We want to provide a platform for partnering churches to mobilize to any one of these communities in times of disaster. Drills like these prepare us to better support the broader mission of the SBC of Virginia, which is to come alongside local churches, and advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ together to reach our neighbors and the nations.” ●

