



MT Worcester | 06/30/2011

## MT Worcester Offers Tornado Relief Efforts

**When tornadoes roared across 18 Massachusetts towns on the afternoon of June 1, the skies went eerily dark and the winds were terrifying. Within hours, however, MT Worcester employees began to offer help to the devastated areas. First on the scene was Anson DeMars, a member of the American Red Cross special disaster assessment team.**



The call came in at 3 a.m. to head to Springfield, but once there, his team members were re-deployed to Worcester County, assessing the damage to homes and businesses in Southbridge, Sturbridge and Brimfield. He got home four days later.

Anson usually jumps on a plane to reach disaster sites. He never expected to use his training so close to home. "I live only three miles from an area that was hit," said Anson, a resident of Charlton, who was home with his wife, son-in-law and grandchildren during the tornadoes. His daughters were safe at a friend's home in Brimfield, but spent some anxious moments in the basement together with neighbors. As Anson went door-to-door to determine whether a structure had major or minor damage, he said, "Everyone I spoke to said they never thought it would happen here."

To help the more than 1,000 families who were suddenly homeless, employees started a food drive. Within a week, Tim Lemieux, who's a part-time firefighter in Spencer, drove a jeep-load of supplies to the fire house (see photo), which became part of a trailer-load of contributions distributed in Sturbridge for families in Brimfield and Monson.

Once people's immediate needs were met, the next wave of volunteers helped to clean up the affected areas. Diane Wassenar and her daughter joined a group of about 30 people in Brimfield to clear debris from one family's once-wooded, now desolate property. "Those of us not brave enough to use a chainsaw spent the morning pulling the remains of a table saw, snow blower, rototiller and sailboat out of the mud about 100 yards away from where their garage once stood," Diane recalled.

Last week, as part of a workspace reorganization, a wooden wall was removed from Bay 8 Extension. Mark Kaliszewski suggested the lumber go to help tornado victims and Jim Laliberte agreed. Through the Red Cross, Mark and Anson found the right person to accept the donation. Mark drove to Brimfield after work last Tuesday with 16 sheets of plywood and more than 30 2x4s. When he pulled up to the church collection site, people were ecstatic. "I don't think these will last long," they told him.

If you would like to help with clean-up efforts in Brimfield, please call 413-245-7253 or 413-245-7162. Given the number of trees down, people with chain saws, chippers or excavator equipment are particularly appreciated. Volunteers will be fed.

Allison Chisolm