



Water and sanitation, Pakistan, © RedR/Tim Hayward

The challenges faced by relief workers in the field are immense, and they are regularly called on to provide solutions beyond their own field of expertise and experience. RedR's Technical Support Service provides free and fast technical advice at the click of a mouse.

To support aid organisations and relief workers on the frontline, RedR provides a free online Technical Support Service (TSS), helping address the need for fast, reliable, expert information and technical support in the field.

We aim to answer all emergency enquiries within 24 – 48 hours of receiving the request – as quick, appropriate solutions can help save lives in an emergency. The service utilises the experience and professional knowledge of experts across a wide variety of fields and offers a cost effective and efficient way of supporting aid personnel on the ground.

What is TSS?

TSS consists of a panel of more than 150 technical experts, including humanitarian and development workers, private sector professionals, and academics who specialise in emergency-related issues. Their areas of expertise include water, sanitation and hygiene, public health, construction and shelter. It also covers fields such as logistics, security, alternative energy, finance, IT, communications, and project management. The service is managed by the RedR TSS Coordinator, who is an engineer and aid worker with extensive field experience.

The service can be used by anyone with access to the internet. It receives support requests to help solve real issues as they arise in the field. Past enquiries have ranged from a runway design for a C130 Hercules transport aircraft, to water quality in Haiti following the earthquake which left more than a million people displaced.

The majority of field enquiries relate to water, sanitation and hygiene issues, with shelter, construction and infrastructure, as well as 'management' and 'technology', proving to be areas of high demand.



Zimbabwe cholera prevention, © RedR/Dan Sanger

I received a range of answers to my query, two of which were very useful because they were from people who had experienced similar problems in the field themselves and could therefore give advice based on sound practical experience. The responses gave me an 'expert view' to back up what I was proposing to the local engineers and therefore helped me convince them that a re-design of the water system was needed - this will give the water system a much better chance of working and providing a clean water supply for a community of 3000 people."

Stephen Jones, working for ACTED in Kyrgyzstan as Water and Sanitation Intern. RedR's TSS provided him with an answer to his query within 24 hours.



How does it work?

As soon as RedR receives an enquiry, we contact the RedR TSS Expert Group. Aid workers seeking to use the service can do so either by filling out an online enquiry form or emailing the enquiry directly to RedR. The request will immediately be passed on to the relevant team of experts and the 'problem' is then researched and discussed before appropriate advice is offered via email. All enquiries and responses are open access and available to anyone on the internet.

TSS responses typically include multiple approaches to solving a given 'problem', based on real world field experience. All responses are sent out by RedR for quality assurance and liability purposes. RedR also continues to provide assistance to aid workers or agencies after a response has been sent. Occasionally we have sent out an expert to assess and provide advice in the field.

Making a difference at field level

Since its launch in 1998, the service has grown significantly; receiving and responding to an ever increasing number of enquiries. Two recent examples of TSS requests:

1) While providing emergency shelter post-conflict to internally displaced people in Sri Lanka, an aid worker requested support, as the shelters were being aggressively attacked by termites. The query received six different practical suggestions for solving the issue - ranging from treatment of pole ends to using termite shields.

2) Following the devastating earthquake in Haiti in January 2010, a relief worker enquired about the effects of a higher rate of nitrates on drinking water quality. Initial responses were received within 24 hours, with more comprehensive advice issued within 3 days. Considerations included increased risk to bottle-fed babies. The advice stated that this should not prevent the water source from being used, rather a campaign should be put in place to provide alternative water for those at risk.

Interested in supporting the RedR TSS panel?

In order to respond to an even greater number and variety of enquiries, RedR is always looking to expand the service. You can support RedR in achieving this goal by making a donation, allowing us to respond to more requests.

Alternatively, if you are interested in becoming a part of RedR's TSS panel of experts - and you feel your technical skills and humanitarian experience would contribute to the service - we would like to hear from you. To join the panel you are encouraged to submit your CV, and RedR will evaluate your technical expertise and experience in a humanitarian and / or development context.

For more information about RedR's TSS, please contact Toby Gould on technical.support@redr.org.uk

Organisations who have benefited from RedR's Technical Support Service (TSS)

All types and sizes of aid agencies and international organisations make use of RedR's TSS to help find the most appropriate solution to issues in the field, quickly and effectively. Some of these include:

- ACTED
- Catholic Relief Services
- Danish Refugee Council
- Goal Ireland
- Helping Hearts for Haiti
- International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)
- OXFAM
- Norwegian Refugee Council
- Merlin
- Save the Children
- UNICEF
- UN Habitat
- Wateraid



Earthquake destruction, Pakistan,
© UNHCR/B. Baloch

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