

Volunteers Help Those Hit by Texas Fertilizer Plant Explosion

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Tzu Chi volunteers in the southwest American state of Texas have provided cash cards and blankets to 135 people affected by a devastating explosion at a fertilizer plant outside Waco. They are looking at how to help the victims to resume their normal lives.

On the evening of April 17, an explosion occurred at the West Fertilizer Company storage and distribution facility in West, Texas 18 miles north of Waco while emergency services personnel were responding to a fire at the facility. At least 14 people were killed, more than 160 were injured and more than 150 buildings were damaged or destroyed. West has a population of 2,700 people.

After the explosion, Tzu Chi volunteers arrived from Dallas, 80 miles to the north, to carry out a survey of the damage. As police officers and fire fighters were still carrying out emergency work, volunteers contacted officials of the local government to offer their support. The next day, Mr Ling Ji-cheng, CEO of the Tzu Chi Dallas branch, joined a telephone conference of the Emergency Operation Center. He also contacted Ms Anna Tangredi, who is leading the relief operation, to ask how Tzu Chi volunteers could care for the victims.



Although it was a serious disaster, the number of households affected did not exceed 500, the number needed to qualify for a subsidy from the Federal Government. So they could not receive help. Many were staying in temporary shelters and very grateful for help from the volunteers.

For three consecutive days from April 20, the volunteers distributed cash cards and blankets. The amount for each household depended on the extent of the damage they had suffered; the cards were worth between US\$300 and US\$900. So far 45 households, a total of 135 people, have benefited. One of the recipients said: "After the explosion, no-one understands our pain. This has a big impact on us. I can feel the love of Tzu Chi volunteers. Thank you!"

Maria was a victim of the explosion who suffered cuts on her face and arms. She told volunteers that the explosion had taken away her home and the hearing in her right ear. "Thank you," she said. "Thank you very much!" Even though she is still worried about her hearing, she expressed her deepest gratitude toward the volunteers. Ling Ji-cheng said: "We are here to comfort them, to help them resume their daily life and rebuild their homes."

The volunteers will continue to work with other rescue organizations and help the disaster survivors rebuild their lives.