

Technisches Hilfswerk (THW)

German Federal Agency for Technical Relief

About us

THW (Technisches Hilfswerk) is the Federal Agency for Technical Relief of the Federal Republic of Germany. Its statutory tasks include the provision of technical assistance at home and humanitarian aid abroad.

Today, more than 76,000 volunteers, as well as roughly 850 full-time employees, work for the federal THW organization. Together, they form the foundation of the qualified technical assistance provided at home and abroad. The THW has 6,000 vehicles of various types at its disposal.

The diversity of its units reflects THW's range of operations. For example, there are Technical Groups on the local level which focus on recovery, clearing, electricity, supply, water damage / pumps, management / communication, bridge- building, infrastructure, water hazards, location, logistics, drinking water supply and oil damage and last but not least the special units SEEBA (Rapid Deployment Unit Search and Rescue) and SEEWA (Rapid Deployment Unit Water Supply and Treatment).

Official functions

The functions of THW are defined in a Federal law. These functions consist in providing technical relief in the sectors of civil defense, disaster relief and international humanitarian assistance. The main fields of activity are rescue, salvage and rehabilitation of infrastructure (water, electricity, sewage).

Structure

Under the direction of THW-headquarters

- 8 offices of state commissioners
- 66 regional commissioners
- 665 local sections with voluntary local commissioners form the organizational structure of THW.

Training

The main asset of THW is the professional knowledge of its volunteers. These volunteers represent a wide scope of technical and other professions on various levels of expertise and experience. All THW-members receive a special training in several stages in the local sections and at the two THW-training centers. The training is concentrated on skills needed for national and international relief missions.

Units and equipment

Throughout the Federal Republic THW maintains 727 technical platoons, each with 34 volunteers. Each platoon consists of one command squad with 4 volunteers and three special sections with 9-18 volunteers.

These types of special sections are provided by THW in following numbers:

- 1433 rescue and salvage
- 80 general infrastructure
- 152 debris clearance
- 129 boat and pontoon
- 92 electric supply
- 148 illumination
- 107 pumping and sewage
- 69 search and detection
- 65 command, control and communication
- 66 logistics
- 37 blasting
- 22 water supply and treatment
- 14 temporary bridge construction
- 15 oil pollution
- 4 sections for the Rapid Deployment Unit Search and Rescue
- 5 sections for the Rapid Deployment Unit Water Supply and Treatment

Each unit is provided with the particular equipment it needs as i.e. emergency tenders, tool and gear carriers with special equipment and material, personnel transporters, trucks, emergency power generators, water treatment plants, trailers (e.g. for equipment), cranes, multipurpose bulldozers and boats. In total over 6,000 vehicles are of the disposal of THW.

Missions

In Germany, THW is requested in many cases of emergency, particularly when its equipment and the special skills of its members are needed for assistance in local or regional emergencies. The Federal Government has frequently ordered THW to provide international assistance in crisis situations such as earthquakes, flooding, drought and refugee emergencies. In general these operations are integrated into plans of action of the European Union or the United Nations. As of today, THW has carried out hundreds of missions abroad.

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