



Georgia-made machines producing ice for hurricane refugees

The Associated Press - WASHINGTON

Red Cross officials initially didn't understand the donation. A company was offering to send two ice machines from Georgia to Houston, where thousands of hurricane victims are stranded.

Not until the devices arrived did officials realize these weren't your garden-variety machines found outside convenience stores. They're the size of a small house, each able to produce 13,000 pounds of ice a day.

The logistical problem of how to cool the tons of water, juice and soda arriving for the refugees had finally been solved.

"They contacted us saying, 'We're willing to help,' and we said, 'Come on,'" said Mike Healy, director of maintenance and engineering for the refugee effort in Houston.

Only a week ago did Atlantic Beach, Fla.-based IceHouse America get a patent on its invention _ a vending machine that produces a 16-pound bag of ice in eight seconds. The machines are made at the company's production facility in Moultrie, Ga.

Company president Bob Alligood said he had to send volunteers a picture of the machines before convincing them of how significant the donation could be.

"People couldn't really understand what we were saying," Alligood said.

Besides the two \$100,000 machines currently being used outside the Astrodome, Alligood said two more are targeted for Mississippi when local officials decide where they want them.

Healy said Houston-based Sparkle Ice has also donated bags of ice, and the contributions from the two companies are basically providing for all of the ice needs for the refugees.