THE RED CROSS EMBLEM

Canadian Red Cross
In June 1859, Henry Dunant, a Swiss citizen, witnessed a horrendous sight at the battle of Solferino in Italy, where more than 40,000 wounded and dead soldiers lay untended, with few medical services available. Dunant gathered local citizens to set up temporary infirmaries. He chronicled his experiences in a book titled *A Memory of Solferino* in which he appealed for relief societies to be formed to care for the wounded in wartime and for those volunteers who assist the army medical services to be recognized and protected through an international agreement and symbol.

Dunant and four other Swiss citizens formed a committee and organized an international conference in 1863 that resulted in the adoption of a red cross on a white background as the distinctive emblem for relief societies for wounded soldiers and the birth of the International Red Cross Movement. In 1864, a Diplomatic Conference of 12 governments adopted the first Geneva Convention on the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded on the Field of Battle (which became the first treaty of humanitarian law) to formalize protection of medical services on the battlefield.
INTRODUCTION

The Red Cross is one of the most recognized emblems in the world. It is also, however, one of the most poorly understood. The Red Cross is an international symbol of protection and the rules of its use are defined in international law under the Geneva Conventions and restricted by Canadian law.

It is hoped that this pamphlet, by providing information and guidance about these rules and restrictions, will prevent imitation and improper use of the Red Cross name and emblem.

The effectiveness of this distinctive and universally recognized symbol of neutrality—vital to individuals who are entitled to protection in times of armed conflict—can only be ensured if the rules surrounding its use are strictly observed.
WHAT DOES THE RED CROSS EMBLEM MEAN?

The first Geneva Convention addressed this issue when it recognized one international symbol—the red cross on a white background—to clearly distinguish and protect military and volunteer medical personnel and facilities from attack during armed conflict. Today the Red Cross emblem remains a universally recognized symbol of assistance and represents humanity, neutrality and impartiality. The Red Crescent on a white background has equal status in certain countries.

Red Cross and Red Crescent workers help those suffering from hardships such as famine, disease and armed conflict around the world. In the name of humanity and under the protection of these emblems, they work in great personal danger and extreme hardship. They carry no arms and their only shield is the universally recognized Red Cross or Red Crescent emblem.
WHO CAN USE IT?

Members of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement are authorized to use the emblem in accordance with their national legislation and the Movement’s regulations. National societies, such as the Canadian Red Cross, use the emblem to identify their humanitarian work and to support their own events and fundraising campaigns.

In times of conflict, the Red Cross emblem and the words “Red Cross” may also be used to identify the medical services of armed forces and civilian hospitals. Only the Canadian Red Cross—and the medical corps of the armed forces during times of armed conflict—may use the Red Cross emblem in Canada.

As a party to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, Canada is obligated to promote respect for the emblem and take measures to prevent and repress any misuse of the emblem and the Red Cross name. It is only through continued vigilance that the emblem’s protective role can be preserved.
WHAT IS MISUSE OF THE EMBLEM?

Because the legitimate use of the Red Cross (and Red Crescent) name and emblem is so widespread, many mistakenly believe the emblem is in the public domain and that its use is unrestricted. However, any use that is not authorized by the Geneva Conventions Act and that does not adhere to the Canadian Red Cross Society Act and the Trade-marks Act constitutes a misuse of the emblems. All unauthorized use threatens the integrity of the emblems as a symbol of protection, impartiality and neutrality.

Misuse can be found on the Internet, computer software, business cards, corporate letterhead, signs, billboards, commercial vehicles, clothing and in catalogues, books and magazines. The most common forms of misuse occur in the health and retail sectors, especially first aid products and services or toys. Some believe that the Red Cross emblem is an internationally recognized symbol of first aid. **IT IS NOT**. The Society cannot grant permission for its emblem to be used at first aid or emergency locations when it has no control over the location or its personnel. Doctors, dispensaries, private clinics, pharmacies or first aid products that are not provided by the Canadian Red Cross are not entitled to display the emblem.
IS THE EMBLEM A CORPORATE LOGO?

The Red Cross emblem IS NOT a corporate logo. An international treaty and Canadian laws protect the emblem from any commercial use. Use of the Red Cross emblem is restricted to avoid erosion of its distinctive meaning. These limits are not to protect any interest of the Red Cross. In fact, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and individual National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies do not own the emblems. They are licensees under the Geneva Conventions with specific authority to use the Red Cross or Red Crescent names and emblems for specific humanitarian purposes. The emblem is legitimately linked to the Canadian Red Cross Society’s humanitarian services.
CAN WE BE FORCED TO COMPLY?

Most people and organizations that have misused the Red Cross emblem voluntarily agree to stop such practices once the true significance of the misuse has been explained to them. When voluntary compliance is not forthcoming, both the Government of Canada and the Society can and will take legal action.

Measures to protect the emblem exist in three separate pieces of Canadian legislation: the Geneva Conventions Act, the Canadian Red Cross Society Act and the Trade-marks Act.

CAN WE USE A SIMILAR SYMBOL?

The use of any form of red cross on a white background, or any symbol so closely resembling a red cross than it can likely be mistaken for it, is prohibited in Canada. This includes a red cross with text or designs or a cross with similar colours, such as different shades of red.

WHAT CAN OTHER ORGANIZATIONS USE AS A FIRST AID SYMBOL?

An alternative symbol of first aid—a green cross on a white background—is recommended by the International Standards Organization and used in various countries including Canada. The Standards Council of Canada can provide further information about this symbol.
HOW CAN WE PROTECT THE RED CROSS EMBLEM IN CANADA?

Those of us who live without the constant fear of armed conflict must protect, nurture and spread knowledge of the true meaning of the Red Cross emblem. Please report any misuse of the Red Cross emblem or name to your local Red Cross office or contact us at feedback@redcross.ca.

No incident of misuse is too small to report. By vigorously preventing the misuse of the emblem in peacetime, you help preserve its ability to protect the vulnerable in times of armed conflict.

THE RED CROSS EMBLEM

The Red Cross emblem is the protective shield of humanity. It is one of the world’s most widely recognized emblems—consisting of five red, equal-sized squares forming a cross on a white background.

Canadian Red Cross
OUR MISSION

The Canadian Red Cross mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity in Canada and around the world.

www.redcross.ca