

Everyone is moved when they hear the news that disaster has struck a community. Earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, fires, and other types of disasters can suddenly change the life of a family, community and country.

The National Donations Management Committee, composed of voluntary organizations active in disasters, and federal/state/local government emergency management personnel, has developed the following information for people interested in supporting disaster relief efforts.

1. FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS ARE OFTEN THE BEST KIND OF DONATION TO MAKE.

Providing a financial contribution to a voluntary organization involved in disaster activities is often the most sensible and the most efficient way of helping the people in need. There are many voluntary organizations with considerable experience in disaster relief in areas such as needs assessment, clean-up, mass feeding, mass sheltering, first aid, crisis counseling, pastoral care, child-care, pet care, home repair, family casework, meeting “unmet needs” and many other areas. *When the public supports these voluntary organizations with financial contributions, it helps ensure a steady flow of important services to the people in need after a disaster.*

Please visit www.nvoad.org for a list of the major disaster relief organizations involved in preparedness, prevention, response and recovery in the United States. To learn more about disaster relief organizations involved in

international disasters please visit www.interaction.org. Try to find out as much as you can about the work of the voluntary organization by asking questions of them and learning of their experience in disaster work. Guidance for assisting disaster victims outside the USA can be found at www.usaid.gov or www.cidi.org (Center for International Disaster Information).

Cash contributions to voluntary organizations also make sense for other reasons. The voluntary organization will often spend the money in the local disaster area thereby helping the local economy to recover. Cash donations rather than unsolicited donated goods avoid the complicated, costly and time-consuming process of collecting, sorting, packing, transporting, unloading, resorting, storing, repackaging, and distributing the goods. Cash donations to voluntary organizations help meet the needs of survivors more precisely, as the voluntary organization is in a better position to purchase, or provide vouchers to purchase, what the people need. Cash donations to recognized relief organizations are also tax deductible.

2. USED CLOTHING IS RARELY A USEFUL ITEM TO COLLECT FOR DISASTER RELIEF.

Used clothing is rarely a useful item to collect and send into the disaster area because it is hard to clean, sort, pack, transport, store, and distribute. Mounds of clothing take up valuable warehouse space and frequently end up being discarded. *Constructive things to do with used clothing are to have a yard-sale to raise money for the*

disaster relief organizations that provide goods and services that are needed by the survivors. Used clothing and other small items can also be donated locally to help community-based organizations helping others in need.

3. CONFIRM WHAT IS NEEDED BEFORE TAKING ACTION!

The most effective way the public can assist is to support the experienced disaster relief organizations with either financial contributions or *in-kind goods and services* that the organizations report are needed. Many experienced voluntary organizations involved in disaster relief have toll-free numbers staffed with operators who can provide information about which donated goods are needed in the disaster area. Often, when large-scale disasters occur, the State’s Office of Emergency Management, working closely with the voluntary organizations, will establish a toll-free Donations Hotline for the public to call to learn what donated goods and services may be needed.

It is often a mistake to assume what is needed in a disaster. Over the years, there has been considerable waste of countless tons of clothing because it was collected and sent with no prior coordination. *Donors should be wary of anyone who claims that “everything is needed” in a disaster. Get precise information before collecting any donated goods.*

4. DONATE THROUGH A REGISTERED ORGANIZATION.

It is never a good idea to collect goods for disaster relief without a firm plan in place that confirms the goods are needed, who will receive the goods, how the goods will be transported and how they will be distributed.

During a disaster, experienced disaster relief organizations base their activities on overall situation assessments and detailed needs assessments. Many relief groups have people and facilities ready to store and distribute the goods. Coordination with the relief group is essential to ensure the right goods are collected, the right amount is collected, and that logistics issues such as transportation, warehousing, and distribution are fully discussed. *Donors will find that it is often most practical to focus on one or two items that an organization needs rather than collect a variety of items.*

5. TRANSPORTATION MUST BE PLANNED IN ADVANCE.

Transportation is frequently a major problem for donors and relief operations. It must be organized in advance; otherwise, a donor can easily be stuck with large amounts of donated goods and no means of transporting it to the recipient organization.

Do not assume unsolicited relief supplies will be transported free (i.e. fuel is not free) or at government expense. The donor has the primary responsibility to find transportation for the goods they are donating. Local trucking firms may be willing to help in times of disaster, if funds are available to cover part of the expense. *Donors often raise money to help pay transportation costs.*

6. DONATED GOODS MUST BE WELL PACKED AND LABELED.

After confirming that the goods are needed and there is a plan to receive, store and distribute them - the receiving organization will give you

instructions about how the goods should be sorted, packaged and labeled. If unsure of this process, discuss these steps with an experienced disaster relief organization. Specific content lists should be taped to the side of each box. This allows the receiving officials to determine the contents of the box without opening it, thereby allowing for a more timely distribution.

Put yourself in the shoes of the person on the receiving end of the shipment and think about making the unloading, unpacking, warehousing and distribution as simple as possible.

7. VOLUNTEERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO AFFILIATE WITH A VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATION INVOLVED IN DISASTER RESPONSE AND RECOVERY.

If you want to volunteer for disaster work, before the next disaster strikes, get some disaster training. You will be in a better position to find meaningful volunteer work after the disaster. Volunteering through a voluntary organization active in the disaster provides a better chance of insurance and liability protection. There are many tasks to do after a disaster – cleaning up and rebuilding are two of the biggest. Various voluntary organizations and the local government may be aware of these opportunities for volunteers in the long and difficult recovery phase. Watch the local media carefully to learn what volunteer efforts are being organized. *If there is a Volunteer Center in the area, it is an excellent source of information about volunteer opportunities after a disaster.*

In the immediate disaster response period there are often many people who want to volunteer at the same time. Remember to be patient. It may not be perfectly clear until a few days after the incident how a volunteer can get involved. There are often greater needs for volunteer help when the community enters the long-term recovery period. *Volunteers should plan to be as self-sufficient as possible so that they are of little, if any, burden on the disaster-affected community.*

This information is provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (National VOAD). For more information about FEMA please see www.fema.gov and for National VOAD see www.nvoad.org.

Both organizations believe it is very important for people to get involved and help their fellow citizens in time of disaster. The generosity and kindness of people around the country does a lot to help communities heal from the tragic consequences of disasters. However, it is important to first coordinate the help with experienced disaster relief organizations and/or the State and local emergency management offices so that the people in need of help receive it in the most timely and effective manner.

How to Donate Successfully:

1. Provide a financial contribution to a voluntary organization involved in disaster activities.
2. Find out what services state government is providing via Website or state donations hotline.
3. Do not begin collecting, packing or shipping until or unless you have a known recipient to accept it.

How to Volunteer Successfully:

1. Get training before the next disaster.
2. Connect and affiliate with a voluntary organization.
3. Consider volunteering for the long-term community recovery.
4. Check with your local Volunteer Center for volunteer opportunities in your own community (1-800-Volunteer).
5. Plan to be as self-sufficient as possible (go to www.ready.gov for assistance in developing your plan).



When Disaster Strikes...

HOW TO DONATE OR VOLUNTEER SUCCESSFULLY!

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NATIONAL
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ACTIVE IN DISASTER



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