

Must Read: BEFORE You Collect Donated Goods

The most effective way for Americans to assist with relief efforts is to make a cash contribution to a humanitarian organization they trust.

Why Financial Contributions are Preferred:

- Experienced disaster relief agencies prefer the flexibility of cash donations because they avoid the labor and expense of sorting, packing, transporting and distributing donated items.
- Agencies use cash to meet disaster survivors' specific needs more quickly, and money spent in disaster-impacted areas helps local economies to recover more quickly.

Confirm the Need Before Collecting:

- Relief agencies prefer the versatility of cash donations; however, some agencies have the infrastructure in place to store, transport and distribute donated items such as food and clothing.
- To prevent waste, ***get precise information and confirm the need*** before collecting any donated goods. Items should only be donated to agencies that have requested them specifically.
- Be wary of anyone who claims "everything is needed." While every effort to help survivors is appreciated, disaster workers do not have the time, people power or money to dispose of unneeded donations.

Can I Volunteer in Foreign Disaster Areas?

- Volunteer opportunities in foreign disaster settings are extremely rare, and usually are limited to people with prior disaster experience and relevant technical skills (such as health or engineering).
- In a country struggling to respond to and recover from a disaster, an influx of unexpected or unneeded volunteers and donations can make response efforts even more difficult.
- Some questions potential volunteers should ask themselves before entering any disaster area, domestic or foreign, include:
 - Am I affiliated with a disaster-relief agency that can provide me with a specific mission and resources to accomplish that mission?
 - How will my needs for food, water and shelter be met?
 - If I am injured, will appropriate medical care be available?
 - Will language be a barrier to my effectiveness, and will local authorities recognize I am there to help?
 - Once I enter the disaster area, will I be able to leave?