



NEWS RELEASE

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FLORIDIANS ASKED TO DONATE WISELY TO HELP SURVIVORS OF FOREIGN DISASTERS

*An informed approach to Disaster Donations maximizes your
ability to help make a difference abroad*

TALLAHASSEE – Florida residents are no strangers to natural disaster, so their desire to assist survivors of the recent catastrophes in the Caribbean and South America is understandable. Governor Charlie Crist and officials from the Governor's Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service (Volunteer Florida) and the Florida Division of Emergency Management urge everyone to donate wisely to help survivors of foreign disasters.

“Our hearts and prayers go out to the victims of the recent disaster events just beyond our borders,” said Governor Crist. “During times of crisis, Floridians have always given unselfishly of their skills and resources to aid others in need.”

The most effective way for Americans to assist with relief efforts is to make a cash contribution to the humanitarian organization of their choice. Information on identifying humanitarian organizations that are conducting relief operations and accepting cash donations for their efforts in Peru, Jamaica, the Cayman Islands and Mexico is available by calling the Center for International Disaster Information (CIDI) at (703) 276-1914 or visiting www.cidi.org.

“Monetary gifts are especially important in responding to natural disasters in the Caribbean and South America because U.S. dollars are of great value in the region,” said Volunteer Florida CEO Wendy Spencer. “Gifts of cash also empower relief agencies to provide goods that are environmentally, culturally and socially appropriate for the disaster area.”

(more)



Why Financial Contributions are Preferred:

Experienced disaster relief organizations prefer the flexibility of cash donations because they help to avoid the labor and expense of sorting, packing, transporting and distributing donated goods. Voluntary relief agencies can use cash to meet disaster survivors' specific needs more quickly. In addition, money spent in or adjacent to disaster-impacted areas helps local economies to recover more quickly.

Confirm the Need Before Collecting:

Relief agencies prefer the versatility of cash donations; however, in rare cases, some have the infrastructure in place to store, transport and distribute donated goods. To prevent waste, donations of goods should be made only to agencies that have requested specific items.

Donors should be wary of anyone who claims that "everything is needed." Many groups have been disappointed that their efforts and the goods they collected were not appreciated. A community hit by disaster, however, does not have the time, manpower or money to dispose of unneeded donations. Get precise information and confirm the need before collecting any donated goods.

"Through Florida's recent experiences, we've learned that a coordinated response with volunteers and donations management can make a world of difference to impacted areas and survivors," said State Emergency Management Director Craig Fugate.

Can I Volunteer in Foreign Disaster Areas?

In a country struggling to respond to and recover from a disaster, an influx of unexpected or unneeded volunteers and donations can make the process even more difficult. 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), and who are affiliated with disaster relief agencies such as the American Red Cross.

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?

The Governor's Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service was established in 1994 by the Florida Legislature to administer grants under the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993. The Commission grants funds to Florida AmeriCorps and National Service programs; encourages volunteerism for everyone from youths to seniors to people with disabilities; promotes volunteerism in emergency management and preparedness; and helps to strengthen and expand Volunteer Centers in Florida. For more information on Florida's emergency management program please visit www.FloridaDisaster.org

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