



## NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **SAFETY FIRST!**

### **POTENTIAL DANGERS ARE MANY FOR UNAFFILIATED VOLUNTEERS**

*Volunteers should avoid entering impacted areas at this time, unless trained and deployed by an experienced disaster relief organization.*

**STATE EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER, TALLAHASSEE** – The Governor's Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service, Volunteer Florida, encourages potential disaster relief volunteers to exercise patience in the immediate aftermath of the Central Florida tornadoes. The focus of first responders today is search and rescue; therefore, citizens wishing to help should avoid entering the impacted area until authorized by local officials. Many dangers exist for volunteers who are not specially trained and deployed by experienced disaster relief organizations, such as The Salvation Army or the American Red Cross, are many.

Serious injury can result for anyone dealing with the aftermath of a major disaster, so it's wise to be overly cautious.

“While the urge to provide immediate assistance in disaster areas is understandable, safety has to come first,” said Volunteer Florida CEO Wendy Spencer. “Until conditions on the ground are deemed safe, a financial gift to the relief organization of your choice is the **very best** way to assist in the immediate aftermath of these devastating tornadoes.”

(more)

Financial contributions allow relief organizations to respond with maximum speed and flexibility to meet the needs of survivors. In addition, money spent in or near affected areas helps to restore local economies after disaster strikes. Please visit Volunteer Florida's Disaster Response and Recovery Web site, located at [www.volunteerfloridadisaster.org](http://www.volunteerfloridadisaster.org), for a list of relief organizations that need your financial support **now**.

There likely will be opportunities to volunteer in the affected areas in the coming days. Potential volunteers can contact a local Volunteer Center to offer assistance. They also can visit Volunteer Florida's Disaster Response and Recovery Web site for information on Volunteer Centers and voluntary organizations, or call the Volunteers and Donations Hotline at 1-800-FL-HELP1 (1-800-354-3571) for further information.

The Governor's Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service (Volunteer Florida) 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.

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[www.volunteerfloridadisaster.org](http://www.volunteerfloridadisaster.org)