



NEWS RELEASE



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CONTACT:
Alex Amparo
Director of Emergency Management
The Governor's Commission on Community Service
Volunteer Florida
(850) 510-0801

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 disasters, so their desire to assist survivors of the recent catastrophe in Haiti 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.

The most effective way for Americans to assist with relief efforts is to make a cash contribution to a humanitarian organization that they trust. Information on identifying humanitarian organizations that are conducting relief operations and accepting cash donations for their efforts in Haiti is available by calling the Center for International Disaster Information (CIDI) at (703) 276-1914 or visiting www.cidi.org. You also may visit www.volunteerflorida.org and www.whitehouse.gov for more information.

“Monetary gifts are especially important in responding to the earthquake in Haiti 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 culturally and socially appropriate for the disaster area.”

For those interested in helping with cash donations immediately, simply text “HAITI” to “90999” and a donation of \$10 will be given automatically to the Red Cross to help with relief efforts. This donation will be charged to your cell phone bill. The Salvation Army also is accepting donations on their Web site, located at www.salvationarmyusa.org.

(more)



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, manpower 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 the process 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?

Volunteer Florida, 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 youth to seniors to people with disabilities; serves as the lead coordinator for the state in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery work; supports the Governor's priorities through the promotion of volunteer service to meet important needs; and provides training and technical assistance to faith and community-based organizations statewide. For more information on Florida's emergency management program please visit www.FloridaDisaster.org

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www.volunteerflorida.org

