

DISASTER RESPONSE THE SHIRT OFF YOUR BACK.

When disaster strikes, you're likely to see people in need - you want to help - right now. You would give those in need the shirt off your back. Well-intentioned but inappropriate donations can cause more trouble than sending nothing at all. A good rule of thumb is that clothing is almost never needed. There is simply no storage space. The right kind of donation, however, can exactly match disaster survivors' needs and give them renewed hope. The same is true for volunteering.

Here are some steps to make sure your contribution has a positive, long-term impact:

1. **Check with disaster response programs in the affected areas.** Find out what exactly is needed and what they will need later on.
2. **Decide how your help will be most needed.** Cash is usually preferred over material donations, as it can be used to purchase goods and services in the affected community, often boosting the local economy that was devastated by the disaster. Response teams at the site can acquire exactly what they need right away based on assessments. Cash makes it possible for them to purchase items difficult to obtain or ship. Be selective where you send cash, making sure your money goes specifically to aid the disaster survivors. If you believe that clothing, household goods, people to rebuild homes, would be appropriate think about shipping and handling – make a plan and identify a local contact point.
3. **Ask others to join you** in your response. Working together is usually more effective because there are more people and resources available. Be specific in requesting donations.
4. **Volunteers may be needed** to clean up debris, rebuild homes, or simply comfort survivors. Particular skills or tools are in demand at a disaster site, but make certain the disaster affected community is ready to accommodate the volunteers. Volunteer coordinators working for the disaster response organizations can help schedule your visit, arrange housing and meals, and plan meaningful projects. www.disasternews.net provides timely volunteer information.
5. **Remember, response is long term.** Survivors continue to struggle with unmet needs long after media coverage of a disaster subsides. Planning assistance to arrive weeks or months after the initial impact tells survivors they have not been forgotten.