

RELATED TERMS

- Warehouse Operations
- Local Distribution Site
- Staging Area



Lessons Learned Information Sharing

www.LLIS.gov

BEST PRACTICE

PRIMARY DISCIPLINES

- Volunteers/Donations Management
- Emergency Management
- Public Information

Volunteer and Donations Management: Managing and Distributing Unsolicited Goods

PURPOSE

Discusses processes for managing and distributing unsolicited goods during emergency response and recovery operations.

SUMMARY

After an emergency, the public feels compelled to donate goods to help those affected by the incident. Emergency managers and public officials may educate the public on the need to assist those affected by disaster through cash donations; however, unsolicited goods will inevitably be donated. Emergency managers must create a plan to manage unsolicited goods during an emergency so that they do not hinder response and recovery operations.

DESCRIPTION

Unsolicited goods donated by the public after an emergency can hamper response and recovery operations if not managed effectively. Donations managers should address the transportation, warehousing, and distribution of unsolicited goods in their state volunteer and donations management plan. The Donations Coordination Team (DCT) and other staff at the Donations Coordination Center (DCC) should coordinate efforts to manage and distribute unsolicited donated goods.

Donations Management Process

The process of managing unsolicited goods begins almost immediately following a disaster event. The amount of media attention given to the event directly affects public interest and therefore influences the amount and type of donations received. Once the DCT is activated, offers to donate goods begin to be processed by the DCT staff. The DCT then coordinates logistical support for warehousing, transportation, and distribution of the donated goods with the other agencies involved. Warehouses and local distribution centers are usually operated by voluntary agencies. (See *Lessons Learned Information Sharing Best Practice: Volunteer and Donations Management: Donations Coordination Team*)

Donations Coordination Center

The Donations Coordination Center serves as the central location for coordinating the management of donated goods; it should not serve as a donation receiving location. DCT personnel review donation offers and decide whether to accept or decline them based on needs lists and agency requests. Needs lists are compiled by disaster relief organizations and voluntary agencies who determine the needs of the affected communities following a disaster. Needs lists should be updated regularly and include goods and services that are not needed. All offers to donate goods and services should be prioritized according to needs. Items such as baby food and diapers are high priority, whereas offers of used

clothing are almost always denied. It is important to balance the acceptance of offers with need so as not to generate a surplus of unused goods after the response. After the DCT staff accepts an offer, it should work with the donor to negotiate transporting and receiving the goods to the warehouse.

Warehouse Operations

A voluntary agency should be designated within the state volunteer and donations management plan to establish a warehouse for managing donated goods during an emergency. State planners should identify agencies or voluntary organizations that run their own warehouses or have vast experience with disaster warehouse operations and sign agreements with them before an emergency occurs.

9/11 Warehouse Operations

According to the [New York State Donations Management Plan](#), more than 1.1 million square feet of warehouse space was required to handle donations from September 11, 2001.

Location

The donations warehouse should be located approximately 25-50 miles outside the affected disaster area. The warehouse should also be located close to a major highway, if possible, to ease transportation of goods. Potential warehouse facilities should be identified by the agency in charge before a disaster occurs and designated in the state donations management plans. If possible, a formal agreement or memorandum of understanding should be signed in advance to prevent spending critical time preparing the details of lease or facilities loan agreement during a disaster. Potential sites that could serve as donations warehouses during a disaster include state warehouses, armories, county fairground buildings, convention centers, and gymnasiums. The amount of space needed will depend on the size and scale of the disaster.

Equipment

Warehouses should have equipment available to help donations warehouse operations. Some of the possible equipment needed include:

- Ramps
- Forklifts
- Flood Lights
- Conveyor Belts
- Pallet Jacks or motorized Dollies
- Fuel and oil supply for Forklifts
- Boxes
- Tables
- Racks

Coordinating with the DCT

A representative from the agency running the warehouse should be stationed at the DCC at all times to ensure the warehouse effectively communicates with the DCC. The representative should work with other members of the DCT to coordinate the need for donated goods with the voluntary agencies. Voluntary agencies with specific needs may contact the DCT to request priority of a donation.

Staging Areas

A staging area is often needed during a large-scale donations management operation to receive, sort, inventory, and package goods before distributing to large warehouses or distribution centers. Staging areas are usually operated by voluntary agencies involved in

the warehouse process. The staging location is sometimes located within the warehouse. However, if the staging area is located at a separate facility, the facility should be located approximately 25-50 miles from the immediate disaster area.

Donations should first be sorted and inventoried at the staging area before being sent to the warehouse. Donations are then stored at the warehouse where representatives from local distribution sites arrive on a first-come-first serve basis to pick up needed goods.

Local Distribution Sites

A local distribution site is set up to distribute goods directly to disaster victims or voluntary organizations. Local distribution sites are usually set up by community-based organizations or local voluntary agency chapters and should be located as close to the disaster affected area as possible. The number of distribution sites that are established will depend on the size of the emergency and the number of victims needing donations. It is essential that the warehouse coordinator ensures that the local distribution sites are recognized and authorized to pick up donated goods from the warehouse.

Transportation

The transportation of donated goods to or from the warehouse or staging area is primarily the responsibility of the donor or local distribution center representatives. The state is not responsible for picking up donated goods from donors. The state may choose to assist in transportation in cases where the donation is urgently needed. Emergency managers and voluntary agencies should discuss emergency plans with state transportation agencies and trucking associations before a disaster occurs. If necessary, the organizations should develop a memorandum of understanding or other agreement to provide trucking services during an emergency response operation.

Checkpoints

During a large-scale disaster, law enforcement officials may implement a checkpoint system to control the flow of donated goods to the warehouse and into the affected disaster area. Donations managers at the DCC should coordinate transportation of donated goods with police and checkpoint areas to ensure that all donations are expected at the warehouse facilities. Truckers are often not aware of the warehouse location and attempt to drive the goods directly to the incident site. The police can help keep trucks away from the incident site by assisting with directions and providing more detailed information. The checkpoints may also be used to turn away trucks that are not cleared to transport donated goods to the warehouse.

REFERENCES

- Adventist Community Services
(<http://www.adventist.communityservices.org>)
- Emergency Management Institute, Federal Emergency Management Agency
(<http://www.training.fema.gov/emiweb/>)
- Federal Emergency Management Agency
(<http://www.fema.gov>)
- *Minnesota Donations Management Plan.*
(<http://www.nemaweb.org/?945>)
- National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster
(<http://www.nvoad.org>)

- National Emergency Training Center, Emergency Management Institute, Federal Emergency Management Agency, *State Donations Management Course: Student Manual and Toolbox*, February, 2003.
- New York State Emergency Management Office, *Donations Management Plan*. (<http://www.nemaweb.org/?952>)
- Points of Light Foundation (<http://www.pointsoflight.org>)
- Points of Light Foundation, *Preventing a Disaster within the Disaster: The Effective Use and Management of Unaffiliated Volunteers*, 2002. (<http://www.pointsoflight.org/downloads/pdf/programs/disaster/disasterbook.pdf>)

DISCLAIMER

Lessons Learned Information Sharing (LLIS.gov) is the US Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency's national online network of lessons learned, best practices, and innovative ideas for the emergency response and homeland security communities. The Web site and its contents are provided for informational purposes only, without warranty or guarantee of any kind, and do not represent the official positions of the US Department of Homeland Security. For more information on *LLIS.gov*, please email Feedback@llis.dhs.gov or visit www.llis.gov.