

Be an Effective Donor

The key to obtaining useful donations is to know ahead of time what the needs will be. This generally can be accomplished only by organizations that have local presence before a disaster strikes. FEMA provides detailed guidelines [Volunteering and Donating Responsibly](#) and NVOAD publishes the *Donations Management Guidance Manual*, which is compiled by the National Donations Steering Committee, a consortium of NVOAD, National Council on Emergency Management (now called International Association of Emergency Managers), General Services Administration, Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, Department of Defense, FEMA, and National Emergency Management Association.

NVOAD offers the following guidelines for in-kind donations to disaster victims:

- The preferred contribution to an affected community is cash.
- The need for items should be confirmed by a disaster relief organization on site before the items are sent.
- Donations should be made through an organization. Items should not be sent to the disaster site.
- A plan should be in place that details how donated goods will be transported.
- Donated goods should be packaged well and labeled clearly.
- Unsorted goods are rarely needed in the early stages of disaster relief. They should be sent later (if at all).

Here some examples of donations that were not very helpful.



This wagon of hay was sent to the emergency care facility at Tropical Park, Florida, after Hurricane Andrew, but not enough staff members were available to unload it. In the hot sun and daily rain it was soon rendered useless and added to the debris. Donations should not be sent directly to the disaster site.



Damaged packages of dog food have to be removed so they will not be a public health hazard. Out of date and damaged goods should not be donated, and donations should be clearly labeled

and well packaged.



A volunteer helps remove some of the 4 tons of used halters and lead ropes that were sent by organized youth groups to restrain horses after Hurricane Andrew. After highly publicized disasters, well-meaning sponsors frequently send items that they consider important but for which a need has not been established.