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VDEM Offers Instructions and Tips for Donating to Help With Hurricane Florence Relief Efforts

Visit <http://www.vaemergency.gov/get-involved/> to learn the best ways to get involved (and what not to do).

RICHMOND—Many Virginians witnessing the devastation from Hurricane Florence through the media will be compelled to get involved or to donate to assist in relief efforts in the Carolinas. It is important to know the best ways to get involved without risking your own economic or personal safety, and without causing additional burden to those areas receiving unsolicited aid. The Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) offers these tips on how to donate or volunteer right, *and* what not to do.

TO DONATE TO RELIEF EFFORTS

- The most effective way to support communities impacted by these storms is to donate money and time to trusted, reputable non-profit charitable organizations.
- Cash donations offer non-profit agencies flexibility to address urgent needs. These organizations can obtain needed resources nearer to the disaster location, not only getting needed supplies to those rebuilding after the storm, but also providing economic aid that helps local businesses from which these emergency supplies are purchased to recover faster.
- **Do not** donate unsolicited goods such as used clothing, household items, medicine, or perishable foodstuffs. When used personal items are donated, the helping agencies must redirect their staff away from providing direct services to survivors in order to sort, package, transport, warehouse and distribute items that may not meet the needs of disaster survivors.
- Donate through a trusted organization. At the national level, many voluntary-, faith- and community-based organizations are active in disasters and are trusted conduits through which you can donate to disaster survivors. Individuals, corporations and volunteers can learn more about how to help on the [National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster \(NVOAD\) website](#).

CASH IS THE FASTEST WAY TO ASSIST DISASTER SURVIVORS

Cash offers voluntary agencies the most flexibility in obtaining the most-needed resources. Many charities specialize in providing relief in disaster areas, yet they face significant financial barriers to getting their staff, equipment, and supplies into

impacted areas.

Your donation helps put experienced disaster responders on the ground, and gives them the tools they need to help survivors recover. Organizations typically prefer cash donations because they allow organizations to:

- Purchase food, water, medicine, and equipment from secure and familiar supply chains
- Buy materials locally – which can help rebuild the local economy
- Conserve resources – money is always necessary and cheap to send, but the cost to ship material supplies can be expensive.
- Remember, material supplies such as used clothing, miscellaneous household items, and mixed or perishable food require helping agencies to redirect volunteer labor away from providing direct one-on-one assistance to sort, package, transport, warehouse, and distribute items that may not meet the needs of disaster survivors.

DONATE THROUGH A TRUSTED ORGANIZATION

At the national level, many voluntary, faith- and community-based organizations are active in disasters, and are trusted ways to donate to disaster survivors.

If you'd like to donate to assist those affected by disaster, these organizations are the best place to start.

[NATIONAL VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS ACTIVE IN DISASTER \(VOAD\)](#)

[VA VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS ACTIVE IN DISASTER](#)

[VIRGINIA DISASTER RELIEF FUND](#)

TO VOLUNTEER IN THE DISASTER AREAS

Volunteers **should not** self-deploy. Unexpected volunteers showing up in impacted areas will create an additional burden for first responders. NVOAD says the situation may not be conducive to volunteers entering the impacted zones and individuals may find themselves turned away by law enforcement.

- Potential volunteers are asked to register with a voluntary or charitable organization of their choice, many of which are already deployed and supporting survivors on the ground. The [NVOAD website](#) is offering links to those who wish to register to volunteer with community- and faith-based organizations working in the field.
- To ensure volunteer safety, as well as the safety of disaster survivors, volunteers should only go into affected areas with a specific volunteer assignment, proper safety gear and valid identification.
- Volunteer generosity helps impacted communities heal from the tragic consequences of disasters, but recovery won't happen overnight. There will be volunteer needs for many months, and years, after the disaster, so sign up now.

DO NOT SELF DEPLOY

Seeing images of disaster may compel you to head to the impacted area. Don't underestimate the complexity of working in a disaster area. Until a need has been identified and the local community impacted has requested support, volunteers should not enter.

- Be sure to affiliate with existing voluntary organization before coming to the disaster area, and that organization has been asked to respond.
- Wait until it is safe to travel to volunteer sites and opportunities have been identified.
- Once assigned a position, make sure you have been given an assignment and are wearing proper safety gear for the task.

Be patient. Recovery lasts a lot longer than the media attention. There will be volunteer needs for many months, often years, after the disaster – especially when the community enters the long-term recovery period.

AFFILIATE WITH EXISTING NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS BEFORE GOING TO A DISASTER AREA

Immediately following a disaster, a community can become easily overwhelmed by the amount of generous people who want to help. Contacting and affiliating with an established organization will help to ensure that you are appropriately trained and supported to respond in the most effective way.

The impulse to help when others who are suffering is commendable. However, volunteering inside a disaster area can be dangerous, stressful work in extreme environments.

If you'd like to volunteer to assist those affected by disaster, these organizations have specific disaster roles and are the best place to start.

[NATIONAL VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS ACTIVE IN DISASTER \(VOAD\)](#)

[VA VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS ACTIVE IN DISASTER](#)

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VDEM works with local government, state and federal agencies and voluntary organizations to provide resources and expertise through the five mission areas of emergency management; prevention, protection, mitigation, response and recovery. To learn more about ways VDEM is working to improve disaster preparedness, response and recovery, visit www.vaemergency.gov.
