



## Humanitarian Aid in Times of Disaster

Categories : [Charity/Helping Others](#), [Disaster Related](#)

The following information is summarized from an article, "[Guidelines for Appropriate International Disaster Donations](#)" by the Center for International Disaster Information.

### Offering Aid – Most Effective Way to Help

Cash donations to support the work of relief agencies working in disaster regions are the best way to help in times of disaster. For information about appropriate giving, links to lists of relief agencies responding to a disaster, situation reports from the field, and other relevant resources, please visit the following web sites:

**The Center for International Disaster Information (CIDI)** The Center for International Disaster Information is a conduit for information about international disasters and humanitarian relief, and educates the public on how to offer aid and assistance during a disaster. CIDI operates under a grant from the United States Agency for International Development's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance.

- [Center for International Disaster Information](http://www.cidi.org/)(<http://www.cidi.org/>)

### The American Council for Voluntary International Action (Interaction)

InterAction is an alliance of U.S.-based international development and humanitarian nongovernmental organizations, and lists on its web site the names, addresses, phone numbers and web sites of the relief agencies that are providing the humanitarian response for each disaster.

- [American Council for Voluntary International Action \(InterAction\)](http://www.interaction.org/)(<http://www.interaction.org/>)

### Donations of Food, Clothing, Medicine are Not Helpful

For the following reasons, well-intentioned and generous donations of food, clothing and medicine is not the appropriate way to help victims of natural or man-made disasters.

- The shipping of commodities to disaster areas is expensive and problematic, and will likely to be limited to essential, urgently needed, priority items requested by relief organizations operating in the field. Paid transport is likely to be cost-prohibitive based on the distance, the customarily heavy nature of food and clothing donations, and potential customs duties that may be charged—even for goods in-transit through third countries. In most cases, the costs of transportation and delivery far outweigh the value and usefulness of miscellaneous items collected.
- Department of Defense policy now prohibits the mailing of unsolicited mail and care packages for military troops because of safety and security concerns. Similar concerns exist regarding unsolicited commodity donations for disaster victims overseas.
- International relief agencies adhere to strict guidelines and regulations related to nutritional requirements, as well as cultural and religious norms of the affected populations; therefore collections of canned goods and other food commodities are not useful. Items that may be needed in the future are available in the region, and are more likely to be compatible to local tastes and requirements.



- The World Health Organization has set forth strict regulations regarding the donation of medicines and medical supplies for disaster victims around the world. The selection and procurement of these items is best left in the hands of the professional relief agencies that can ensure that the specific medications be procured rapidly, in adequate quantities.
- Relief agencies such as The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), United Nations agencies, and US-based relief organizations often pre-position emergency supplies within the affected regions.

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*SOURCE: Center for International Disaster Information; American Council for Voluntary Action (Interaction)*

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