

## **Making a Difference When Disaster Strikes**

Whenever a disaster hits a community, citizens and community organizations quickly reach out and ask the very important question, “How can I help?” To answer this question, here are some guiding principles that will make a difference in how well we are able to meet the needs of victims and help them get back to a sense of normalcy as quickly as possible.

### *Financial Contributions are Top Priority*

Voluntary relief organizations are called upon to carry out various facets of the rescue, recovery, and rebuilding phases of a natural disaster. These organizations require financial support to purchase supplies, cover labor costs, and maintain effective and efficient operations. Financial contributions are considered a top priority because:

- (1) donated goods require labor and expenses of sorting, packing, transporting and distributing donated goods;
- (2) voluntary relief agencies responding to the disaster can use cash to more quickly meet the *specific* needs of the survivors; and
- (3) the local economy can recover more quickly if relief supplies are purchased directly in the impacted community.

### *Donating Goods*

Volunteer Prince William works with local governments’ public information offices to provide a message to the media describing the supplies that are most needed. Individuals, groups, and businesses who are not able to provide financial support are encouraged to donate supplies on the list. To gather the needed supplies, some people organize collection sites (donated goods drives) in local communities. These drives are important activities and much appreciated. However, as with all donated goods, our goal is to distribute collected supplies in an efficient and effective manner to those who need them. So, to help us meet that goal, we offer the following helpful hints to ensure an effective “donated goods drive”:

- 1. Collect only items on the publicized list of needed supplies.**
2. Sort like items together (for example, cans of corn together in one box, cans of peaches together in one box, etc.
3. Limit the weight of the boxes to 30 pounds.
4. Tape boxes shut securely.
5. Label the boxes on at least two sides.
6. Include a description of the contents on the label.
7. Boxes should be on pallets and shrink-wrapped, if at all possible.
8. Provide a written inventory of the boxes.
9. Be prepared to provide transportation to the designated Donated Goods Warehouse.
10. Coordinate delivery with Warehouse manager as the publicized instructions will indicate.
- 11. Do not donate clothing** – Although well intentioned, unsolicited donations of clothing from individuals or groups have hidden costs and create problems that impede relief efforts. For this reason, sending or delivering clothing to areas impacted by disaster is not recommended.