

It's tragic. The loss. The sounds. The smells. The smoke lingering in the air. The hearses following one behind another, carrying loved ones. What can we do to help?

Food? Clothing? Money? What will replace what these victims have lost? Not even time will completely heal a large percentage of victims and their families.

So we set out with good intentions and begin a clothing and food drive. We are going to help our neighbors. Help them satisfy their hunger and basic hygiene needs, give them some new clothes to wear, some new dishes in their kitchen for the food we give them for their pantries. We are helping them. Moreover, we are helping comfort ourselves.

We begin to spread the word about what we are doing. Our social circle joins in, our churches join us. We are all gathering goods to send to the scene. Some of the stuff we get together isn't quite new, but they have nothing, so they will appreciate it. Some of the stuff we send is food that isn't really tasty, but they're hungry, so they'll eat it. Some of the stuff we send is out of date, out of style, slightly worn – but they need stuff, so we send it.

Now, step back and put yourself on the receiving end. You're dealing with loss, devastation, grief, disbelief. Eighteen wheeler loads of "stuff" keeps coming into your community. You must deal with it. Your social circle, your church, your organization must rent a warehouse to store all this "stuff", sort all this "stuff", clean all this "stuff", and get all this "stuff" where it can actually be beneficial to the victims you were trying to help. You are overwhelmed. You are thankful for the support, but you are simply overwhelmed.

Several organizations have the experience necessary to deal with such massive amounts of donations, but many don't. We all love to see a firefighter on the scene reaching out to get a cooling rag during a brutal wildfire. We love to know that WE are making a difference to others. So do that. But, please plan ahead and give grave consideration to what YOU send, what YOU provide.

Our emergency management plan addresses donation management and uses proven theories to request monetary donations for victims, instead of food, clothing, household items, etc. In MOST disasters, money is the missing link to helping victims recover. During the recent West, Texas disaster, they were overwhelmed with donations. One emergency responder there estimated that 90% of the clothing that was donated to those victims wound up stored in a warehouse. Once they were able to manage the donations, the urgent need was gone. Donations were then disposed of and proceeds were put into a long-recovery fund. They were ultimately turned into a useful donation – money. Be Safe Out There!!