

Are you ready?

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

What to do when giving during a crisis

When a crisis such as the tornado that tore through Joplin, Missouri, in 2011 occurs, it's not uncommon for men and women with no connection to the areas devastated by such disasters to donate money to help the communities rebound and rebuild. Donations sparked by tragedies such as the Joplin tornado are commonly referred to as "crisis giving," which also occurred in the aftermath of other notable disasters, including the 2011 tsunami in Japan and Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Crisis giving can bring out the best in donors, many of whom will donate as much as they possibly can in spite of the sacrifices their donation requires. But crisis giving isn't as simple as generous men and women may think, and it's good to follow a few guidelines when donating during a crisis.

* Be on the lookout for criminals. Crisis giving brings out many people's generosity, but it also brings criminals out of the proverbial woodwork. Criminals may establish fake charities designed to entice donors who just want to donate to a cause as quickly as possible. These charities may present themselves as another reputable charity, establishing Web sites that appear legitimate to the naked eye. Thousands of such sites were

discovered in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, so if donating online, be certain that the Web site you're using really is the authorized site of the charity to which you plan to donate.

In addition, many criminals will solicit donations via e-mail. If you haven't requested information from a charity, delete these e-mails before opening them. If you mistakenly open them, do not open any attachments, which may contain viruses.

* Investigate donations made via text message. Donating via text message may seem like a great way to ensure your donation makes an immediate impact. After all, such donations can be made in a matter of seconds. However, Charity Navigator, a nonprofit evaluator of charities, notes that it can take as many as 90 days for a charity to receive funds donated via text message. Your donation might prove more immediate if you donate in a traditional way.

* Designate your donation. If you're donating to a charity for a specific reason, such as Hurricane Isaac relief, then designate your donation when making it. Many charities allow donors to make this designation when they donate via the organization's Web site. If you choose not to designate your donation,

then your money may very well go toward the charity's operating costs, which benefits the charity but not the victims of the crisis whom you were intending to help.

* Value reputation when crisis giving. Choose a charitable organization with a proven track record of handling disaster relief. Such organizations have already proven their mettle and are likely to make the most out of your donation. This isn't to say start-up charities born of specific tragedies aren't well-intentioned or incapable, but more established charities might be in a better position to handle crisis situations than start-ups.

* Avoid sending care packages. Natural disasters tend to produce harrowing images of victims forced to go without basic needs like food, water and shelter. This tends to inspire men and women to send care packages consisting of food, water, blankets, and other items they feel will help in a time of crisis. Unfortunately, these goods are not likely to reach any victims, as established charities likely already have agreements and plans in place to distribute necessities provided by a host of companies. While donating care packages is well-intentioned, financial donations are more valuable during a time of crisis.



Devastation resulting from natural disasters typically inspires charitable donations. But men and women must make those donations wisely to ensure they're used as effectively as possible.

The dos and don'ts of backyard fire pits

Once a rarity, fire pits have grown increasingly popular in recent years, as more and more homeowners turn their homes into private oases. Fire pits run the gamut from the very simple to the more elaborate, and the fire pits homeowners choose often depend on the space they have available as well as their budgets.

But even homeowners without any space or budget constraints should give careful consideration to which fire pit they ultimately install, especially if they plan to make that installation themselves. The following are some dos and don'ts of fire pits for those homeowners about to add this relaxing and popular accessory to their backyards.

DO confirm you can legally build a fire pit in your yard. Fire pits have become so commonplace that homeowners may think there are no regulations governing their construction. However, it's still best to confirm with your local government planning or zoning offices if you can build a fire pit and if any restrictions apply.

DON'T proceed with the project until you have been granted official approval. Assuming you have the go-ahead to build a fire pit is not the same thing as knowing you have been approved. Starting early could result in fines if it turns out you aren't allowed to have a fire pit. But you may also begin building a bigger fire pit than the local government allows, and that could be money down the drain later. Wait until you get official word before you proceed with the project.

DO build on flat ground. The fire pit should be built on flat ground to reduce risk of accident and/or injury. A fire pit built on flat ground also means everyone can enjoy it comfortably and equally once the project is finished. If the ground around the

pit is not flat, some people may be forced to sit crooked or lean forward just to enjoy the pit.

DON'T build near flammable structures. Build the fire pit far enough away from existing structures, such as your home, garage or shed, so flickering flames do not catch some wind and lead to disaster. Before building in a given spot, monitor the wind patterns for a few days by sitting in a lawn chair at the spot you ultimately want the fire pit to be. If you notice the wind is blowing toward your house, you will want to choose another area for the pit so smoke from the fire will not be blowing into your home every night.

DO choose the right size. The size of your fire pit will depend on the space you have available, but even if you have a vast swath of space, keep in mind that professional contractors typically recommend building a fire pit no bigger than 44 inches wide. Anything larger can be unsightly and may not appeal to prospective buyers down the road. In addition, an especially large fire pit may result in potentially unruly flames that can present a fire hazard.

DON'T go it alone if your DIY skills are suspect. Installing a fire pit is a relatively inexpensive DIY job, but that does not mean anyone can do it. Ground needs to be excavated and the slope of the yard must be measured so the fire pit is safe and functional for years to come. If your DIY skills are not up to snuff, hire a professional contractor so your backyard oasis does not become a costly headache.

A fire pit can turn a boring backyard into a relaxing retreat. But homeowners must adhere to the dos and don'ts of fire pits to ensure their retreat is something they can enjoy for years to come.



Disinfecting water during an emergency

When a weather emergency occurs, the effects can prove devastating. Natural disasters like hurricanes have turned cities upside down, floods have caused the deaths of thousands and snowstorms have shut communities down for days.

A weather emergency, be it a natural disaster or a heavy storm, can contaminate the local supply of drinking water and disrupt the wastewater disposal system. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, such a disruption or contamination can directly threaten a person's health. As a result, it's important for men and women

to know how to disinfect their drinking water should an emergency occur and the supply be at risk.

The easiest way to avoid health issues that arise from a contaminated water supply is to keep plenty of bottled water on hand and use as drinking water and when cooking. So long as the bottled water has not been exposed to flood waters, it will be safe to drink.

If an emergency strikes and you don't have any bottled water at home, don't panic. Boiling water can help make the water safe, killing most types of disease-causing organisms that

might be present. Boil water for one minute before allowing it cool and then store in containers for later use.

In an emergency situation, the water could very well be cloudy. This is also not a cause for panic. Instead, filter the water through clean cloths or just allow it to settle. When allowed to settle, chances are the cloudy water will clear up within minutes. Once it does, use the clear water when boiling.

If there's no means to boiling the water, you can use household bleach as a disinfectant. Bleach is effective at killing some, but not all, disease-causing organisms that might be in the water. If the water is cloudy, filter it through clean cloths or allow it to settle before attempting to disinfect it. Once the water is clear, use this clear water for disinfection. When ready to disinfect the water, the EPA recommends adding 1/8 teaspoon (or roughly eight drops) of regular, unscented liquid household bleach for each gallon of water. Do not use non-chlorine bleach to disinfect water. Once added,

stir the bleach and water mixture well, then let it stand for 30 minutes before use. Once disinfected, store the water in clean containers with covers.

The treated water should have a slight odor of chlorine. If it does not, repeat the process and allow the water to stand for an additional 15 minutes. After this step, if the treated water exhibits a strong odor of chlorine or tastes strongly of chlorine, allow the water to stand exposed to the air for a few hours or pour the water from one clean container to another several times.

For those who rely on well water, in the case of a flood have the water tested and disinfected once the flood waters have receded.

Should a weather emergency occur and the water supply be disrupted or contaminated, heed the advice of local health departments or public water systems. More information about disinfecting water and surviving a weather emergency is available at www.epa.gov.

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PUT TOGETHER A PLAN

Make sure all the pieces are in place to render you and your family prepared in the event of a natural disaster.

- Listen to radio or television newscasts for the latest weather information, and follow all evacuation directions and suggestions.
- Keep a stock of non-perishable food items as well as bottled water on hand inside your home.
- Keep a 72 Hour Kit on hand inside your home that is easy to get to in the event of a disaster.

For more information and tips on disaster response and preparedness, contact your local emergency services center.
South Lane Fire & Rescue • 233 Harrison Ave, Cottage Grove 541-942-4493 • 55 South 1st Street, Creswell 541-895-2506



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