



On The Web

Identifying Volunteers Before The Next Disaster

(NAPSA)—Experts at the National Weather Service are projecting a 75 percent chance that the Atlantic hurricane season will be above normal this year. When such devastating natural disasters strike, volunteers are often able to help communities weather the storm.

“Whether it involves preparing homes to withstand hurricanes, cleaning up after flooding or rebuilding destroyed homes,” explains Jonathan Gibbs, director of 1-800-Volunteer.org, a service of the Points of Light Foundation, “volunteers can help victims recover from a disaster.”

Gibbs is quick to point out, however, that untrained volunteers often show up at disaster areas unprepared, potentially creating a “disaster within a disaster.” Lacking direction and practical knowledge of the situation, these good-intentioned individuals may actually hinder the recovery effort and put an additional strain on the limited resources available to aid the victims.

Fortunately, the Internet has come to the rescue. The Points of Light Foundation created a Web site to serve as a national initiative to preregister, affiliate and inform volunteers who would like to assist in times of disaster—enabling organizations within the disaster area to locate and match skilled volunteers with local needs.

HelpinDisaster.org is part of an online, community-based volunteer network, 1-800-Volunteer.org, which the Foundation built for volunteer centers to manage. The system is used in 38 states by more than 175 volunteer centers



Volunteers now have a place to sign up to help—before assistance is needed.

and nearly 30,000 organizations, and provides access to nearly 200,000 registered volunteers.

As an example of the system’s efficacy, during the 2005 hurricane season, organizations and volunteer centers in the Gulf states were able to manage the huge number of volunteers who wanted to help by using the Web site and a toll-free phone number. Volunteer centers were able to drive interested volunteers to the Web to register, freeing up local phone lines.

“During Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, more than 5,000 volunteers were activated and contacted using the HelpinDisaster.org technology and volunteer network,” Gibbs says. “As the awareness of the system has grown, more and more volunteers are registering and getting involved in preparation activities today.”

Volunteers can call 1-800-VOLUNTEER or go to www.HelpinDisaster.org to identify volunteer opportunities in their community. Volunteer managers can use the system to post, manage and track volunteer projects—including preparing and organizing volunteers during emergency or disaster situations.