Unit 4: Managing Unsolicited Donated Goods

Introduction
During this unit, we will discuss the need to emphasize that cash donations are best. Since goods will still be donated, we’ll talk about operating a collection center and distribution centers. We will also discuss the benefits of continuing operations through recovery.

Objectives
At the conclusion of this unit, you will be able to:

1. Describe why cash donations are more economically feasible than donated goods.
2. Define requirements for collection centers.
3. List types of distribution centers.
4. Summarize the benefits of operating through recovery.

Scope
- What Does It Cost?
- Flow of Donations
- Collection and Distribution Centers
- Manage Those Goods: An Activity
Managing Unsolicited Donated Goods

Unit Objectives

Objectives

1. Describe why cash donations are more economically feasible than donated goods.
2. Define requirements for collection centers.
3. List types of distribution centers.
4. Summarize the benefits of operating through recovery.
What Does It Cost?

Visual 4.3

- Someone donates canned goods.
- The canned goods are gathered at a centralized point and boxed.
- The box of canned goods is loaded on a truck and shipped (which costs dollars).
- The truck is unloaded.
- The cans and individual items are resorted.
- The sorted items are repacked in specially marked donation boxes.
- The boxes are shipped to a distribution site.
- Disaster survivors pick up the donated goods.
- Statistical information indicates that the cost of donating a can of food through the stages of management is at least $10 vs. a can that is purchased at about $.85.
• Cash is best—it assists the local economy in its recovery.
• Buying products within the local economy helps the recovery of the community.
• Cash can be used to buy exactly what is needed, when it is needed, not what the donor believes is needed.
• It also ensures freshness of the product.
• Some donated goods may be out of date.
Even though you may have a good public education strategy about the proper way to volunteer and donate goods:

- Cash is best
- Affiliate to volunteer
- Donate properly

Your community needs to be prepared to address goods and volunteers coming into a disaster site.
Flow of Donations

Most of the time, the goods will go to a Collection Center. If the goods are packaged correctly and are needed, then they can be directed straight to a Local Distribution Center.

In a small emergency or jurisdiction, the collection and distribution may be done from the same building. However, it is VITAL to separate the warehouse collecting and sorting operations from the distribution operations.

You could even use the back of a building for drop off and the front for pick up if you only have one building.
Collection and Distribution Centers

Visual 4.7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collection Centers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Often public sites for collecting unsolicited goods</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Converts “Stuff” to “Goods”</td>
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</tbody>
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An efficient management program will take “stuff” and make “goods” out of it.
Visual 4.8

Collection Centers (Continued)

- Develop a plan to operate and demobilize a collection center
- Identify, sort, inventory, and prepare items for distribution
- Consider structure for distribution
  - Voluntary agencies
  - Faith-based organizations
  - Survivors at distribution centers
- Record and document process

Potential collection centers should be identified before an event or disaster occurs. Businesses and residents who live nearby need to know what these centers are. They should be included in your plan along with information management considerations for recording and tracking:

- What goods are received
- Who made donations in order for them to receive recognition
- How goods will be distributed and transported to non-profits, survivors, distribution centers if established, etc.
- Your local plan should also include a criteria and process for demobilizing collection centers and/or a warehouse.
Information Management

- Inventory Tracking
- Systems may be interrupted
- Create redundancy with layers
  - Web-based technology
  - Non-networked computer
  - Paper forms that duplicate electronic entries

You may need to start your inventory with a pen and paper.
- You may have 30 people dropping off bags of donations before you get a computer to track your inventory.
- Power outages and Internet interruptions can also halt computer-based inventory control.
- Always have a backup in case technology fails.
- Paper copy may be predominantly used as the initial method of inputting information before you have the opportunity to input it into a computer.

Consider having the inventory program on a stand-alone computer, so if the internet is down, you can still use a computer.

Have forms printed out from the computer program so you can use paper-based if the computer is not available.

Redundancy across all systems is key to success.
Effective communications is key to having successful operations. For example, external communications can help identify where all the goods are at all times—what is coming in and when it is coming in. This type of communication provides a base for planning the number of volunteers you will need to assist in operations. Internal communications is as important as external communications.

Effective collection, sorting, and inventory of donated goods is incomplete without a mechanism in place for the distribution of collected items.
Eventually, the voluntary organizations can transition remaining goods to their own storage areas or warehouses. If there is not a plan on how to open, run, and close a warehouse, there will be a loss of time, money, and resources.
**Manage Those Goods: An Activity**

Visual 4.13

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**Manage Those Goods!**

1. Review the scenario and read additional information.
2. Answer the questions/issues to consider.
3. Summarize your responses on the easel chart.
4. Be ready to report to the class.

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**Purpose:** To select warehouse space and accept donated goods that are needed based on the details of a scenario.

**Directions:**

- Review the scenario (in Unit 3).
- Read through the additional scenario information for this unit.
- Working with other members of your small group, answer the questions for Unit 4.
- Record your answers on the easel and be prepared to report to the class.
Additional Scenario Information:

The media message created in Unit 3 has been released. Between word-of-mouth about the fire, Tweets, blogs, local newspaper articles, and even a few TV news reports, many donors have been drawn to collect stuff from their own houses to donate.

Since the fire station is usually locked, town and area residents have started dropping off large green trash bags of donations at the local restaurant. The owner donated a 40’ x 20’ room to house the donations. After a day and a half, the room is full of green trash bags. Extra bags and boxes being dropped off are now being placed on the sidewalk. Two days later, the business owner says, “I’m tired of my restaurant looking like a garbage dump. You need to get that stuff out of here. I’ve got a party using that room in 2 days.”

Questions/issues for this Unit:

- Describe your process for finding space to be used for a new collection center in your town. How would you determine what product(s) are needed by the survivors? What stakeholders would you engage in these processes?

- Based on the scenario and additional information above, list the top 10 items on your immediate “needs list” of donated items and draft another press release/Tweet in which you address these specific needs.

- What groups in your town will you involve in collection center operations and in organizing the “green trash bags” in the restaurant?

- Would you encourage survivors to come to the collection center? If yes, why? If no, what mechanism(s) would you set up for distribution?
Visual 4.14

**Pulling it all together …**

Preparedness/Planning
- Know your team
- Establish MOUs
- Develop phone scripts
- Include SOPs
- Develop triggers for action
- Manage public education

Visual 4.15

**Pulling it all together … (Continued)**

Response
Activating the plan ...
- Public information
- Information management
- Matching needs
- Making changes as needed
- Monitoring staffing
- Working toward recovery
- Demobilizing

Visual 4.16

**Pulling it all together … (Continued)**

Recovery
For the long haul ...
- Making the transition
- Transferring management
- Appealing to public for long term
- Thanking donor
- Establishing After-Action process
What’s In Your Annex?

Visual 4.17

Does your annex:

- Discuss procedures for handling an influx of unsolicited goods?
- List a mechanism for locating collection and distribution centers?
- Designate people responsible for unsolicited goods?
- Discuss criteria for opening and closing collection and distribution centers?
Unit Summary

Summary

1. Describe why cash donations are more economically feasible than donated goods.
2. Define requirements for collection centers.
3. List types of distribution centers.
4. Summarize the benefits of operating through recovery.
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Collection Center Demobilization

Closing a collection center is a matter of timing.

When the flow of donated goods coming into the center slows to small amounts of shipments on a daily basis and the number of offers coming into the call center/donation coordination team has ceased, it is time to announce the closing of the center.

Procedure:

1. Set a date (2 or more weeks in the future).
2. Announce the date to the Distribution Centers.
3. Announce the date to the media.

Prior to closing, encourage the existing Distribution Centers to stock up as much as is reasonable (based on the demand and on their space).

During the last week, make offers to local social service agencies who will be continuing to serve the communities affected by the event.

As soon as the center is empty:

- Return leased/rented/loaned equipment.
- Have phones turned off.
- Clean warehouse.
- Take down signage.
- Send volunteers home.
- Do a walk-through with owner or agent (have utilities transferred to owner/agent).
- Turn over keys.
Thank You Letter for Donations

Sample City
Main Street
Anywhere, USA

Date

Dear:
Willing Citizen
Center Street
Junction City, USA

On behalf of the ____________, I want to personally thank you for your offer of:

3 mattresses including transportation.

Many residents of our city have been impacted heavily by the fire that destroyed the apartment building.

I just wanted to let you know how much we appreciate your willingness to make such an offer to our city’s residents when they were most in need.

Sincerely,

John Stokes
Mayor
Sample City