

Committee on House Administration
1309 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6157
(202) 225-8281
www.house.gov/cha

September 2, 2005

Helping the Victims of Hurricane Katrina

Dear Colleague:

Several offices have contacted the Committee on House Administration or the Commission on Congressional Mailing Standards to inquire about meaningful ways to help those impacted by the devastating hurricane. As the same questions continually arise, we thought it would be helpful to offer written guidance.

First, it is vital that Members provide constituents with information to assist them in helping victims of this natural disaster. In these situations, it is often helpful to provide telephone numbers and other contact information for federal, state, and local government agencies and departments, including those providing services directly to victims and their families. Because a state of emergency has been declared, you are allowed to include addresses and telephone numbers of entities involved in relief efforts being coordinated by the federal government. In the past, Members have provided contact information for blood drives conducted by the Red Cross in conjunction with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). **To summarize, contact information for government entities, as well as private entities directly involved in relief efforts organized by the federal government, may be sent under the frank and posted on your official website.**

Next, several Members have expressed their desires to assist various charities in their relief efforts. There are multiple effective ways to do this, which are also legal. For example, you may, on your official website, provide contact information for several charities, media organizations, and relief agencies involved in relief efforts. Providing a broad listing is helpful for constituents who may come to your website in search of ways to help, as they will find several charities about which they may choose to learn. Additionally, this Committee has authorized Congressional offices to house drop-off/collection points for charitable organizations. Official resources devoted to this purpose, including staff time, should be **negligible** in nature, frequency, time consumed, and expense. In the past, many staff have used their personal time, including lunch hours, to volunteer for charitable efforts outside of the House office. **To summarize, contact information for charities, media organizations, and relief agencies may be posted on your official website, but not sent under the frank; and Members may allow private charities to place boxes for collection of donations in their offices.**

Some Members have been asked to solicit donations on behalf of charities involved in relief efforts. While we understand the good intentions of those making such inquiries, we must remind all Members that it is a violation of law to use the frank to solicit anything in support of any charitable organization or purpose. Members should also not use their websites to solicit anything. More broadly, regulations of the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct prohibit the use of any official resources to solicit funds for charitable organizations or purposes, and prohibit Members from implying that such organizations or purposes have been endorsed by the House of Representatives. **To summarize, Members and staff may not use official resources to solicit anything for charities.**

We hope that Members will utilize every permissible means to help victims. The Committee recommends use of the government established web site for information on the relief efforts, www.first.gov. Additionally, we are [attaching a list of other helpful contact numbers and addresses](#). If

you have any questions, please contact the Commission on Mailing Standards at x59337 (majority) or x52061 (minority), or the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct at x57103.

Sincerely,

BOB NEY
Chairman

JUANITA MILLENDER-MCDONALD
Ranking Member