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## Helping the Victims of the Haiti Earthquake

**From:** *The Committee on House Administration*

**Sent By:** [kyle.anderson@mail.house.gov](mailto:kyle.anderson@mail.house.gov)

**Date:** 1/22/2010

Dear Colleague:

Several offices have contacted the Committee on House Administration, the Commission on Congressional Mailing Standards (Franking Commission) and the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct (Standards Committee) to inquire about the extent to which official resources may be used to help those impacted by the devastating earthquake that occurred in Haiti on Tuesday, January 12, 2010. We would like to take this opportunity to provide a review of the applicable rules, regulations and procedures.

There are many international, federal, state, and local government agencies and departments responsible for providing or coordinating the delivery of U.S. aid and participation in the relief efforts. Telephone numbers and other contact information for several of the key agencies, departments and organizations can be found at the following websites:

**The White House**

[http://www.whitehouse.gov/haitiearthquake\\_embed](http://www.whitehouse.gov/haitiearthquake_embed)

**U.S. Department of State**

<http://www.state.gov/>

**Organization of American States**

<http://www.oas.org/en/>

**United Nations**

<http://www.un.org/en>

**U.S. Geological Survey**

<http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/recenteqsww/Quakes/us2010rja6.php#details>

**United States Agency for International Development's Office of Foreign Disaster (USAID)**

[http://www.usaid.gov/our\\_work/humanitarian\\_assistance/disaster\\_assistance/](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/disaster_assistance/)

In addition, to assist Americans seeking information about family members in Haiti, the U.S. Department of State's Operations Center has established the following hotline number: 1-888-407-4747. The Department advises that due to heavy volume, some callers may receive a recording. Further, the Department cautions that the information being sought may not yet be available as our embassy is still in the early stages of contacting American Citizens known to be in Haiti. Communications, as you might expect, are very difficult within Haiti at this time.

All of the above information may be communicated to your constituents via the usual and customary official communication tools, including your congressional frank, subject to applicable statute and House Rules and regulations. In addition, a Member may post on his or her official Web site(s), channels and pages (sites) a directory of and/or links to third party organizations that are germane to the official content of his or her official postings. Referrals to organizations or links to sites, the primary purpose of which is the solicitation of goods, funds or services on behalf of individuals or organizations are not permitted under the rules of the House.

In addition, Members have asked to what extent they may use their official resources to solicit or collect donations of goods, funds, or services on behalf of charities and other private organizations involved in relief efforts.

We understand the good intentions of those making such inquiries, but the rules of the House preclude Members from using official resources for any purpose other than in support of the conduct of the Member's official and representational duties on behalf of the district which he or she currently represents. This has, in the past, been interpreted to mean that charitable solicitations using official resources are not permitted.

However, it would be permissible for Members to link to *official* government Web sites that give details about the delivery of relief aid, including information about how Members' constituents may provide aid and assistance during a crisis. With respect to the emergency in Haiti, it would be permissible to provide links to any of the government Web sites noted above, including to the official White House Web page for the crisis ([http://www.whitehouse.gov/haitiearthquake\\_embed](http://www.whitehouse.gov/haitiearthquake_embed)), or to the State Department's Web page (<http://www.state.gov/p/wha/ci/ha/>). It would also be permissible to notify constituents about the existence of these Web sites, provided that the franking regulations are followed.

While official resources may not be used to solicit contributions for charitable organizations or to imply that such organizations or purposes have been endorsed by the House of Representatives, Members and staff may solicit in their personal capacities on behalf of organizations that are qualified under § 170(c) of the Internal Revenue Code – including, for example, § 501(c)(3) charitable organizations such as the American Red Cross – without first obtaining Standards Committee approval. These personal efforts may not use official resources (including official time, telephones, office equipment, supplies, and official mailing lists). Other restrictions also apply. Solicitations on behalf of non-qualified entities or individuals are decided on a case-by-case basis through the submission to the Standards Committee of a written request for permission to make such solicitations. For example, solicitations of donations directly for individuals suffering as a result of the crisis, as opposed to § 501(c)(3) charities assisting sufferers, would need Standards Committee approval. For more information, please review the 2008 Ethics

Manual (pp. 347-49) or contact the Standards Committee at 5-7103.

We understand that Members of the House may wish to assist during this time of tragedy in Haiti and we hope this information is helpful to you to inform your constituency of our nation's response, the aid and resources supporting the relief efforts, and the status of Haiti's recovery in the aftermath of this devastating quake. If you have any questions regarding the use of your:

1. Official resources in general, please contact the House Administration Committee at x52061 (majority) or x58281 (minority);
2. Communications resources, please contact the Franking Commission at x59337 (majority) or x60647 (minority); and/or
3. Personal and/or campaign resources or the loan of your name and title to private solicitations and initiatives in support of the relief efforts, please contact the Standards of Official Conduct Committee at x57103

Sincerely,

Robert A. Brady  
Chairman  
Member  
Committee on House Administration  
Administration

Daniel E. Lungren  
Ranking Minority  
Committee on House

Zoe Lofgren  
Chairwoman  
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Jo Bonner  
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