



Frequently Asked Questions About Relief Supplies

Who decides where to send supplies that the trucks bring in?

FEMA, state and local officials meet daily to determine the need for supplies. The state generally designates State Staging Areas and/or Points of Distribution (PODs) where the commodities are ultimately distributed to the public. FEMA may also elect to ship disaster commodities closer to the anticipated impact area, before the disaster strikes, at what are called Incident Support Bases (ISBs) for quicker distribution to the state.

Why does my route change when I am almost at my destination?

State and local leaders decide when and where FEMA should send supplies based on the best information available at the time. During a disaster, conditions are unpredictable. Decisions may change quickly and often, in response to new information and sudden weather changes. The final destination can change while you are on the road, based on events out of anyone's control. As a result, your load may be diverted to another location to meet newly identified demands.

Why are trucks sometimes staged in one place for several days?

There are several reasons why full or empty trucks might sit in one location for a period of days.

- FEMA generally orders emergency supplies 48 to 72 hours in advance of when it anticipates needing the supplies in a disaster area. FEMA needs to be prepared to respond to those needs quickly, which means trucks full of supplies need to be pre-positioned based on the best information available.
- FEMA must be ready to supply federal and/or state staging areas and/or PODs based on the state's requests and until state officials determine there is no longer a requirement.
- FEMA sometimes uses trucks as interim storage for immediate redeployment. This is more efficient than unloading trucks, sending them away, and then bringing trucks back in to reload them before being sent elsewhere. By keeping the trucks loaded, those trucks are ready to go where – and when – the need arises. FEMA attempts to mitigate this affect by sometimes using leased trailers or simply dropping trailers to free up drivers.

Doesn't it cost a lot of money to keep trucks and supplies waiting in a staging area?

FEMA's main concern in an emergency is saving and sustaining lives. Therefore, FEMA's actions are based on responding to the state's request for supplies to assist disaster survivors efficiently and effectively. Although cost is considered, the most important factor is saving and sustaining lives.

Why are there supplies that are left over?

When responding to the uncertain and constantly changing nature of a disaster, it is common to order enough supplies for a "worst case" scenario. Preparing for a major disaster generally means ordering large quantities of disaster commodities 48 to 72 hours before they are likely to be needed, so they will be ready and waiting to meet the anticipated demand. Variables such as wind and water damage, power outages and restoration, debris, road access can affect the volume of commodities needed. As a result, the requirements for disaster commodities can increase or decrease, depending upon the scenario. It is definitely better to have too much, than too little when it comes to saving lives.

What happens to supplies that are left over?

When the need for supplies decreases, FEMA will immediately adjust or stop ordering new products. Unused supplies will be distributed to the affected state or states, in accordance with the law, which may include



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issuing the supplies to voluntary organizations. Remaining supplies will be either restocked at one of the FEMA distribution centers or disposed of in accordance with federal laws and regulations.