



# NORTHERN MIDLANDS COUNCIL

## POLICY MANUAL

### MANAGEMENT OF DONATED GOODS AFTER A DISASTER

**Originated Date:** Adopted 19 July 2010, Min. No. 173/10 (as Policy 60)

**Amended Date/s:** Amended 21 September 2015 – Min. No. 270/15  
Amended 20 August 2018 – Min. No. 230/18  
Amended 15 August 2022 – Min. No. 22/269

**Applicable Legislation:**

**Objective**

- 1) To ensure best practice methods are employed to manage donated goods after a disaster
- 2) To inform Northern Midlands residents on Council's policy with regard to managing donated goods after a disaster.

**Administration:** Governance

**Review Cycle/Date:** Next review 2026

#### BACKGROUND

The Australian Government released the report "Management of Donated Goods after a disaster" in February 2010. The report investigated the phenomenon of unsolicited donations following recent disasters across Australia. The researchers found that the management of unsolicited donated goods creates major problems after a disaster. A large proportion of what is donated is unusable but recovery managers are still required to put significant efforts into administration of the goods e.g. unpacking, sorting, storing and distribution. Disposal at the end of the disaster also required major effort.

The 2009 Victorian bushfires illustrate this well.

*"The Victorian bushfires resulted in the donation of in excess of 40,000 pallets of goods from across Australia that took up more than 50,000 square metres of storage space. The costs for managing these donations i.e. 3 central warehouses, 5 regional distribution points, approximately 35 paid staff, material handling equipment and transport costs to distribute the material aid, has amounted to over 8 million dollars. In addition, volunteer numbers reached 1,500 during the first 3 months provided through over 40 shop fronts. Resources in the fire affected areas immediately after the event were severely stretched as a result of the material aid arriving without warning and without adequate resources to sort, store, handle and distribute."*

Experience from this and other disasters indicates that a large proportion of what was donated may be either unwanted or unusable and eventually have to be disposed of, causing further expenditure and possible outrage from the public.

The report contains the viewpoints of community recovery personnel as well as the recipients of donated goods. It concludes with recommendations for the improved management of donated goods in the future.

The "Management of Donated Goods after a Disaster" report underpinned the development of the "National Guidelines for Managing Donated Goods" that were released in 2011. The guidelines included three key recommendations:

- 1) The need for all concerned to send out a strong, clear message to the public that the most effective way to help is to give money, not goods. This gives recipients flexibility and choice, promotes self-directed recovery and more accurately targets need. It also stimulates local economies.
- 2) That if anyone insists on making a public appeal for donated goods, despite advice to the contrary, advise them that they need to negotiate a strategy for sorting, storing and distributing the goods
- 3) Redirect the public who wish to donate unsolicited goods to either an appropriate non-government/ community sector organisation that has the capacity to take material items, or a registry, if one has been set up, or suggest ways to turn their goods into money e.g. hold a garage sale.

#### POLICY

Council has a Hotline phone/website that local community members and businesses can access after a disaster to register their offers of assistance.



# NORTHERN MIDLANDS COUNCIL

## POLICY MANUAL

At this point of contact very clear scripts are used that include the following key messages:

- Thanking people for their concern and offer of assistance;
- The best way to assist is to provide cash donations;
- That unsolicited goods are not required if people register their contact details and offer of donation, they will be contacted if there is an identified need for the offer they have made;
- Other community options for the donation of second hand goods, such as local charities.