

Guideline for Emergency Donation Facilities

In the event of an emergency, such as a natural disaster, temporary facilities may be set up to receive and distribute donated items to individuals affected by the event. Donated items may include food, household items, personal hygiene items and clothing.

The operator of an emergency donation facility is responsible for ensuring:

- the temporary facility is structurally safe, clean, and easy to access
- donated personal and household items are safe to use
- donated food is safe to eat
- a waste management plan is in place to remove garbage and unwanted items

The following provides information on the safe operation of an emergency donation facility.

Facility Set Up

Obtain approval from the local authority and appropriate government agency before opening an emergency donation facility. A permit may be required for activities such as waste disposal or food distribution.

An approved emergency donation facility must be:

- structurally safe for occupancy
- secured to prevent vandalism
- set up at a site that is capable of handling a large flow of traffic
- maintained in a clean and sanitary manner
- provided with equipment to safely store perishable food and non-perishable items
- set up to prevent cross-contamination of donated items, keeping treated items ready for distribution in a separate area from newly received, untreated items
- provided with a sufficient number of clean toilet facilities and handwashing stations for workers and volunteers
- provided with adequate number of secured waste bins (i.e. for garbage and recycling)

Receiving and Distributing Donated Items

An important objective of an emergency donation facility must be to help prevent the spread of disease and injury to those who receive the donated items. There are number of disease and injury concerns with donated items. For example, are the items being received free of pests, such as bed bugs? Do the donated items meet government safety standards? Have donated food items been handled in a safe manner?

In order to address some of these concerns, take the following precautions:

- 1. Treat and clean donated items before distributing to the public.** A donated item is considered treated if it has been heated or chemically processed to destroy pests like bed bugs. The following options are available for treating donated items:
 - a. Heat-treat donated items in a heat chamber. This is a chemical free treatment process to destroy pests. For example, bed bugs will be killed when heat-treated at 45°C for one hour. For more information on heat chambers, contact a Licensed Pest Control Operator by searching the Extermination section of the Yellow Pages. Heat treatment is the preferred method for treating all donated items received at the emergency donation facility.
 - b. Launder soft surfaced items, for example clothing, bed linens, towels, curtains, soft plush toys, in hot soapy water and dry in a dryer for a full cycle on high heat.
 - c. Dry-clean soft surfaced items that cannot be laundered, for example leather jackets. Search the Dry-Cleaners sections of the Yellow pages for information on companies that offer professional dry-cleaning services. Inform dry-cleaner operators if any items are suspected of having pests, such as bed bugs or lice.

Check the manufacturer's instructions before treating an item. If an item cannot be treated it must be, at a minimum, cleaned by one of the following options:

- a. Air dry items that cannot go in a dryer after they have been washed in hot soapy water, for example, running shoes, baseball hats, jackets.
- b. Vacuum items that cannot be laundered or dry-cleaned, for example soft furniture and floor mats.
- c. Steam clean household items, such as mattresses and upholstered furniture.
- d. Wash hard surfaced items, for example furniture, bed frames, and cooking pots with hot soapy water and leave these items to air dry.
- e. Treat shoes with a disinfection spray before distributing to the public.

- 2. Be aware of pests, like bed bugs.** Do not open bulk bags of donated items in the main receiving area. If you suspect an item is infested with pests or if you are unsure treat the item immediately in a heat chamber before bringing it to the main distribution or storage area. If pests are seen on a donated item, immediately place the item in a bag and seal it. Heat-treat the sealed bag or dispose of it in a secured waste bin.

CAUTION: Donated items that have not been adequately treated have a higher risk of passing on pests, such as bed bugs.

- 3. Inspect all donated items.** Do not accept donated items that are in poor condition. If a slightly damaged donated item is accepted by the emergency donation facility, it must be repaired before it is distributed to the public. A repaired item must be in a condition so it may be used in the manner intended by the manufacturer and it must meet government safety standards. If the item cannot be repaired, it must be properly disposed of or recycled.
- 4. Provide clear instructions** to the public, the media, and local groups wishing to donate items, as to what items are needed at the emergency donation facility as well as what are appropriate and inappropriate items to donate.
- 5. Contact your local Public Health Inspector / Environmental Health Officer**, when you have doubt or questions about the appropriateness of an item being donated or an activity within an emergency donation facility.

Do not allow your emergency donation facility to become a dumping location for unwanted items!

The following provides information on what to look for when accepting donated items.

Personal Items

Personal hygiene items, such as soap, toothbrush, and cosmetic supplies, must be new and received in the original manufacturer's packaging. The manufacturer's packaging must not be compromised or damaged.

Clothing and footwear should be new or gently used. It must be in a condition that allows it to be worn as intended by the manufacturer. It also must be in a condition that does not allow for the transmission of disease, for example lice, bed bugs or fungal infections. Do not accept or distribute undergarments unless they are new and in the original manufacturer's packaging.

Source: Alberta Health Services – Second Hand Stores and Bed Bugs draft document

Household Items

Household furniture and fixtures should be new or lightly used. Items must be in good condition with no visible defects or conditions that may cause injury to users. Items must not allow for the transmission of disease. Do not accept items that may have been stored near or with toxic chemicals.

Assess product safety before accepting items at the emergency donation facility.

- Household items, e.g. kitchenware, bedroom fixtures, and children's toys, must be of a condition that meets current government standards (i.e. Health Canada, CSA, NSF). It is recommended that only new items in the manufacturer's packaging be accepted.
- Do not accept items that may cause harm or injury to the user, such as cribs, child car seats, playpens, or baby walkers. If you have any doubt about the safety of an item, do not accept it.
- Review consumer product safety information, such as advisories, warnings and recalls at Health Canada's website (www.healthcanada.gc.ca/cps). This website provides valuable information on the health risks associated with unsafe consumer products.
- It is recommended that all items be tested to ensure they are in good condition and operational prior to treatment/washing and placement into the general storage/distribution area. **Items that are not in good condition or that do not work must be discarded or recycled.**

Operators of emergency donation facilities are strongly encouraged to promote the donation of new items or cash donations.

Sources: Alberta Health Services, 2009, Child Care Facility Environmental Public Health Information Manual; Alberta Health Services – Second Hand Stores and Bed Bugs draft document

Food Items

Definitions:

Approved food: means the food has come from a permitted facility. A permitted facility is subject to a government inspection at any time.

High-risk food: means food with pH level or water activity level or a combination of pH and water activity levels that will support the growth of pathogenic microorganisms or the production of toxins. Examples of high-risk food include meat, fish, eggs, poultry, dairy products, cooked rice and cooked vegetables.

Low-risk food: means food with pH level or water activity level or a combination of pH and water activity levels that will **not** support the growth of pathogenic microorganisms or the production of toxins. Examples of low-risk food include whole fruits and vegetables, dry cereals, cookies, crackers, commercially canned foods, etc.

A valid Food Handling Permit, issued by Alberta Health Services – Environmental Public Health, is required if food, intended for public consumption, is stored, prepared, processed, distributed, repackaged or served at the emergency donation facility.

Maintain food facilities and transportation vehicles in a clean and sanitary condition at all times.

Practice good personal hygiene while handling, preparing or distributing food products. Do not allow individuals who are sick to handle the food. It is recommended that at least one individual per shift have food safety training.

Keep high-risk foods, if accepted, refrigerated at or below 4°C (40°F) or keep them frozen at -18°C (0°F) or lower at all times, including times of transportation. Do not accept or donate high-risk food that has been kept at improper temperatures. The operator of the emergency donation facility must dispose of food that is not accepted in a manner or location acceptable to Environmental Public Health.

Keep all equipment associated with food handling activities in good repair, in proper working order, and maintained in a clean and sanitary condition at all times.

All food that arrives at the emergency donation facility must be inspected for its safety and quality. **Do not accept the following items:**

- **High-risk food past its expiry or best before date**
- **Home canned vegetables, or home canned meat or fish products**
- **Food contaminated by pests (e.g. mice, bugs, etc.)**
- **Food products with missing labels**
- **Food products in damaged or compromised packaging (e.g. ripped bagged food; bulging or leaking tin cans; flood, fire or smoke damaged foods; etc.)**
- **Donated fish products caught without a commercial license**
- **High-risk homemade foods from an unapproved source**
- **Cracked eggs**
- **Uninspected meat and poultry (e.g. wild game)**
- **Unpasteurized milk or products made from unpasteurized milk**
- **Partially used or unidentifiable foods**

For information regarding shelf life of low-risk foods, such as whole fruit and vegetables and drygoods, consult your local Public Health Inspector / Environmental Health Officer

Source: Alberta Health Services – Guidelines for the Distribution of Donated Foods

Miscellaneous Items

Items being donated that have not been specifically identified in this document must, at a minimum, be inspected to ensure they are:

- in good condition,
- able to be used or worn as intended by the manufacturer, and
- be of an appropriate item for the needs of those who will be receiving that donation.

Ensure all donated items are pest free before placing in the general storage area!

For information on donation of items for pets or agricultural animals, please consult your local veterinarian or Alberta Agriculture at 1-800-527-0051.

Disposal of Items

All emergency donation facilities must have agreements in place with approved/recognized companies to:

- properly dispose of donated items that cannot or will not be distributed to the public
- recycle items, and
- dispose of garbage generated by the operation of the facility.

Secure the waste bins to prevent public access to potentially unsafe items that have been discarded.

All companies must dispose of or recycle items in a manner and at a location approved by the local, provincial, or federal authority having jurisdiction, for example the Local Municipal Bylaw, Alberta Health Services, Alberta Environment, or Environment Canada. For more information on recycling contact the Recycle Information Line 1-800-463-6326.

Contact us at 1-833-476-4743 or [submit a request online](#) at ahs.ca/eph.

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