

Categories

- U.S. news
Security
Crime & courts
Life
Education
Environment
Faith
Military
Giving
Race & ethnicity
Weird news
World news
Politics
Business
Sports
Entertainment
Health
Tech & science
Travel
Weather
Local news

Disable Fly-out

Marketplace

- Credit Score \$0
Start a business
Netflix
Career Center
Homes for Sale
Investments
Autos
Shopping

'Disaster fatigue' blamed for drop in giving
After two major overseas tragedies, Americans are less generous



AP

Ap Associated Press
updated 7:17 p.m. ET May 19, 2008

NEW YORK - The numbers are almost too large to fathom, so many stop trying. As bodies pile up in disaster after global disaster, even the most sympathetic souls can turn away.

Charities know this as "donor fatigue," but it might be more accurately described as disaster fatigue — the sense that these events are never-ending, uncontrollable and overwhelming. Experts say it is one reason Americans have contributed relatively little so far to victims of the Myanmar cyclone and China's earthquake.

Ironically, the more bad news there is, the less likely people may be to give.

Story continues below

advertisement

"Hearing about too many disasters makes some people not give at all, when they would have if it had been just one disaster," says Michal Ann Strahilevitz, who teaches marketing at Golden Gate University and specializes in the factors at play in charitable giving.

Compared with disasters like the Asian tsunami and Hurricane Katrina, those in China and Myanmar have generated just a trickle of aid. As of Friday, Americans had given about \$12.1 million to charities for Myanmar, according to the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University. The group said on Monday that it was too soon to count contributions to China.

Many factors may be to blame

A number of factors may be at play in the slow American response, including a lack of sympathy for the repressive

Cyclone Nargis left widespread destruction in Myanmar, but Americans have seemed reluctant to open their wallets. Compared with disasters like the Asian tsunami and Hurricane Katrina, those in China and Myanmar have generated just a trickle of aid.

How to help quake victims
View list of U.S.-based agencies helping provide relief supplies to victims of China's earthquake.

How to help cyclone victims
View list of charities accepting donations to help Myanmar.

Related stories
Cuba raises death toll from Hurricane Ike to 7
Myanmar cyclone survivors proved tough

- Most popular
Obama rejects McCain call to delay debate
BUSH TO ADDRESS COUNTRY ABOUT BAILOUT PLAN
Mom makeover! From sweat pants to sexy
Thieves stealing children's identities
Nobel Peace Prize could be rebuke of China
Most viewed on msnbc.com

Photo features

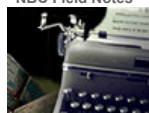


Getty Images



AP

NBC Field Notes



NBC News correspondents and producers across the U.S. shed light on the news of the day.

Sponsored links

- Resource guide
Get Your 2008 Credit Score
Find a business to start
Try for Free
Search Jobs
Find Your Dream Home
\$7 trades, no fee IRAs
Find your next car

governments involved, doubts about whether aid will get through, and an inclination to save pennies because of shaky economic times at home.

But Americans may have also been influenced by the quick succession of monumental catastrophes in two distant lands. At least 130,000 people are dead or missing in the Myanmar cyclone, and the death toll in China's earthquake is expected to surpass 50,000.

"For the vast number of Americans, if they just gave to some disaster far away and then another disaster happens, in their mind that's clumped as 'faraway disaster,'" Strahilevitz says. "So they will feel, 'I just gave to a faraway disaster.'"

This problem came up after the 2004 Asian tsunami, an event that brought an avalanche of \$1.92 billion in charity from the United States, according to the Giving USA Foundation. Hurricane Katrina eight months later generated even more, \$5.3 billion.

But then fatigue seemed to set in. The earthquake in Pakistan that killed nearly 80,000 people generated just \$150 million from Americans. And the Guatemala mudslide shortly thereafter that killed at least 800 was virtually forgotten.

If one disaster can be galvanizing, several in a row can be paralyzing.

"It's too much pain, too much tragedy for someone to process, and so we tend to pull ourselves away from it and either close off from it out of psychological defense, or it overwhelms us," says Cynthia Edwards, a professor of psychology at Meredith College in Raleigh, N.C.

People give closer to home

A string of tragedies can also make potential donors feel nervous about their own safety, making them less likely to give. That could be especially troubling now for Americans, many of whom are worried about their jobs and rising food and gas prices.

It's too soon to judge the effects of the economic downturn on giving, says Del Martin, chair of the Giving USA Foundation, although early figures show that donations rose in 2007. In general, people tend to give to causes closer to home. In 2006, Americans gave more than \$295 billion to charity, but less than 4 percent of that went overseas.

[CONTINUED: The power of a personal connection](#)

1 | **2** | [Next >](#)

 **Discuss Story**
On Newsline

Rate Story: Low High
[View popular](#)

 **Email**

 **Instant Message**

 **Print**

MORE FROM GIVING

[Next →](#) **Giving Section Front**

NEW Clinton summit warns on global warming
MacArthur Foundation awards 'genius grants'
Incubus rocks many worlds with its charity
Charities start to harness the power of the many
10 Tips: How to donate a car to charity
Broads give \$400 million to biomed institute
Jerry Lewis raises record \$65M in telethon
Giving Section Front

Add **Giving** headlines to your news reader:



Featuring [Today](#) [Nightly News](#) [Dateline](#) [Meet the Press](#) [MSNBC TV](#) [Newsweek](#)
Categories [Top stories](#) [Local news](#) [U.S.](#) [World](#) [Politics](#) [Business](#) [Sports](#)
[Entertainment](#) [Health](#) [Tech & science](#) [Travel](#) [Weather](#)
About [About us](#) [Contact](#) [Site map](#) [Jobs](#) [Terms & conditions](#)



Alerts via IM



E-mail updates



RSS & feeds



Mobile headlines



Podcasts



Widgets