



GALLERY: China milk scandal Four babies have died in China after drinking milk products tainted with the chemical melamine.



Wall St crisis will call the shots Managing the fallout from the financial industry's meltdown will be a top priority for the next president.

SA's first site to reach 1.25 million local users

Search News24

Search

News

World : News

NEWS24 ON YOUR PHONE

Terms & conditions

- Homepage World News US Elections South Africa Africa Sport Entertainment Sci-Tech Finance Health Galleries

Special Reports

- The End of Mbeki US Elections Zimbabwe Xenophobia Aids Focus Power Crisis More...

Opinion

- MyNews24 Columnists Sports Columnists Feedback

Time Out

- National Lottery UK Lottery Travel Competitions Horoscopes TV Guides Classifieds Currie Cup game

Mind Games

- Sudoku Aces High Silly Solitaire Word Cube Make 24 Golf Solitaire Battleship

Cartoons

- Stidy The Biggish Five Treknet

Services

Newsletters Select GO

Weather



Cape Town: 10-16°C

Durban: 16-25°C

Johannesburg: 9-26°C

Weather Page

Traffic



All regions

Indicators

'Disaster fatigue' after tragedies

21/05/2008 13:30 - (SA)

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.

"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 specialises 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 \$12.1m to charities for Myanmar, according to the Centre on Philanthropy at Indiana University. The group said it was too soon to count contributions to China.

A number of factors may be at play in the slow American response, including a lack of sympathy for the repressive governments involved, doubts about whether aid will get through, and an inclination to save pennies because of shaky economic times at home.

'I just gave to a faraway disaster'

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 \$1.92bn in charity from the United States, according to the Giving USA Foundation. Hurricane Katrina eight months later generated even more, \$5.3bn.

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

If one disaster can be galvanising, several in a row can be paralysing.

Psychological defence

"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 defence, or it overwhelms us," says Cynthia Edwards, a professor of psychology at Meredith College in Raleigh, North Carolina.

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 petrol 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 \$295bn to charity, but less than four percent of that went overseas.

Personal connection to region

One thing that may make people give to foreign causes is their personal connection to a region, either by knowing someone there or hearing an individual's story, Strahilevitz says. That's something that's difficult when unpopular governments are involved, or media access is restricted, as in Myanmar.

Lurma Rackley, spokesperson for CARE USA, is heartened that Americans are giving to Myanmar at

Want to know more? Answerit can help.

Print Article Email Article

Related Article

- China steps up aid effort World Bank won't help Myanmar China: 5 million left homeless 3 days of mourning in Myanmar Poor must repay climate aid Brit rescuers denied entry Grim forecast for Myanmar Cyclone: 1.5m face death Foreign donors give freely Rice price hampers cyclone aid Myanmar rejects aid workers

Vehicle Search

PEUGEOT 2008 Partner 1.9 D Dsl P-Van R131800

MAZDA 2005 Mazda3 1.6i R99990

PEUGEOT 2008 308 XT 1.6 5-dr R206288

MAZDA 2007 Mazda3 1.6i MY07 R139990

PEUGEOT 2007 207 XR 1.4 5-dr R114995

- Search for a used car Search for a new car

Sponsored links

- Life Life Insurance Car Insurance UK Lottery First for Women Your Homeloan Bid or Buy Medical Aid Education SA TV Online Best Car Deals Loans & Credit Cards Compare Quotes Life Insurance for Women Nike's Bad Listener Car Servicing & Repair Piggs Peak Casino

Rand/\$	8.1500
Rand/£	15.0900
Rand/€	11.9500
Gold/oz	\$882.05
Gold Mining	1896.71 +0.00%
All-share index	24923.34 +0.00%

all, considering the lack of images from the disaster. "There's always concern that the tragedy is going to be forgotten," Rackley says.

CARE USA, World Vision and Mercy Corps all say giving for Myanmar is on pace to match the amount given after the Pakistan earthquake, although the Myanmar death toll appears to be far bigger. That's partly because of concerns about whether aid will reach the intended recipients, with reports that Myanmar's military government may be confiscating the aid or diverting it from those most in need.

Dave Morris, 34, tries to donate 10% of his income to causes such as public radio, the Red Cross and breast cancer. But the engineer from Ypsilanti, Michigan, hasn't given to the relief efforts in Myanmar and China, in part because the world's problems seem impossibly large.

'It wouldn't be a drop in the bucket'

"If you thought about at this very second the number of people who were suffering and dying, I could dedicate all my resources to that and yet it would be a drop in the bucket," he says.

Still, experts in the field are optimistic that Americans may still come through for victims of these disasters. The Giving USA Foundation says companies are pledging relief funds for China, perhaps because so many do business there.

Gerard Jacobs, director of the Disaster Mental Health Institute at University of South Dakota, was in Bangkok working with the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre when the cyclone struck Myanmar, and he got word of the earthquake while in a meeting about helping governments in the region to respond to victims' psychological needs.

"I think we may also see a surge of donations for the China relief effort because of people's frustrations with the Myanmar government's resistance to the aid effort there," says Gerard

Spotlight



Calling all Tongmasters and Spice Girls!
Visit our National Braai Day WAP site for free mobile downloads, champion braai recipes and a handy Braaictionary!

Partners

Afrikaans
Select [dropdown] GO

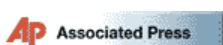
English
Select [dropdown] GO

What is this?

Brought to you by OUTsurance Car Insurance

[News24 Headlines on your Facebook profile](#) [News24 on mobile](#)

-- Top stories in this category --



JOBS

<p>Product Manager Gauteng Media</p> <p>Financial Manager CA (SA) Gauteng Mining / Geology</p> <p>Senior Recruitment Consultant Gauteng - Midrand Accounting / Finance / Auditing</p>	<p>Audit Manager Western Cape Accounting / Finance / Auditing</p> <p>Senior Tax Administrator/Consultant Western Cape - Cape Town Accounting / Finance / Auditing</p> <p>Temp Accountant Gauteng - North/Sandton Media</p>	<p>Perm Accountant Gauteng - North/Sandton Media</p> <p>Head of Credit & Risk Gauteng IT / Telecomms</p> <p>Accountant Gauteng Accounting / Finance / Auditing</p>
--	---	---

[Search jobs](#) · [Register your CV](#) · [Advertise a job](#)

[About us](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Contact us](#) | [Job opportunities](#) | [Press Releases](#) | [Site map](#)



[Back to top](#)