

Relief for Asian tsunami victims



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People around the world were deeply touched by the Asian tsunami at the end of last year that swept across 11 nations and killed between 200,000 and 300,000 people.

It was a national bank holiday in Britain – the day after Christmas Day. As Britons sat at home watching scene after scene of devastation, many started asking what could be done to help save lives and rebuild those shattered communities. Like most nations across the globe, the British Government gave a large donation – £200 million for aid relief and long-term regeneration. On a personal level, people in

Britain donated a record-breaking £300 million.

Back at work the next day, the staff at Durbin didn't waste any time putting the 'large-scale disaster plan' into action. We made a financial contribution and donated quantities of essential pharmaceuticals and medical supplies. As usual, the aid agencies were first on the scene and their immediate task was to assess the damage and draw up lists of medicines and equipment that were most urgently needed.

So from our first day back at work after the seasonal break, the phones started ringing with aid agencies asking for antibiotics, water purification equipment and drugs, disinfectants and trauma drugs – all with a 24-hour turnaround. There wasn't a minute to waste, so less than a day after each request the items were picked, packaged and delivered to the airport. It's amazing what can be achieved if the logistics – including a huge stock of essential emergency items and an excellent team of workers in our new warehouse – are in place. And as the financial donations poured in, our customers kept sending longer and longer lists requesting medical supplies.

In the following days and weeks, once the reconstruction projects were well

underway, Durbin co-ordinated and partly paid for the freight of £74,000 worth of donated medical supplies to the Maldives. We have also been involved in co-ordinating medicines donated by various manufacturers. So far, with our help, over £1,300,000 worth of pharmaceuticals have been flown to Sri Lanka.

And though we are more than happy – indeed proud – to be involved with this relief effort, the important factor when it comes to donations and supplies for this kind of disaster is that what is being sent matches exactly with what is needed.

Otherwise un-needed products fill up warehouses, which is obviously a waste of space, and then they later need to be destroyed – which is time-consuming and costly.

Not only that, it's demoralising for the aid workers on the scene to open long-awaited boxes and packages to find that they've been sent medicines that aren't needed or, perhaps worse, medicines that are needed but have expired.

Pharmaceutical companies like Durbin have a responsibility to listen carefully to the aid agencies and fulfil their needs, not just to act quickly because they want to be involved. After all, what's the point of trying to help yet actually making the situation worse?

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Durbin PLC is a British company based in South Harrow, London. Established in 1963, the company specialises in supplying quality assured pharmaceuticals, medical equipment and consumable supplies to healthcare professionals and aid agencies in over 145 countries. As well as reacting rapidly to emergency situations, Durbin PLC responds to healthcare supply needs from local project level to national scale programmes.

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At least we can hope that, in the not-too-distant future, that tsunami warning systems will be put in place where they are needed so that the world will never witness devastation on such a large scale again. ■