



The destruction wrought by Hurricane Katrina has left millions of Americans in dire need of help, and the used-car industry has joined in efforts to help.

Mike Linn, executive vice president of the National Independent Automobile Dealers Association, said he's spoken with the association's state officers from Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. "They all seem to be fine," Linn said, "but they're not in the middle of things. I know they are checking in on their members, many of whom don't have power or telephone service, so it's been difficult." Linn has contacted other association members about a disaster relief fund.

"The NIADA has created a NIADA disaster relief fund," Linn said, "and we're asking for a generous donation. Your donations will not be tax deductible, but they will be relayed directly to the three state associations in Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi with the stipulation that the money be spent for appropriate relief within the dealer community."

Linn said people will need jobs to help the economies in the affected states.

"To get those jobs, they will need cars," Linn said. "To get the cars, our friends and dealers need to re-open their businesses. We can help them. Together we can make a difference."

Linn said the initial response to this request was heartening. As of Tuesday, Sept. 6, more than two dozen dealers had donated \$3,000. Because Katrina also touched the Florida panhandle, the NIADA added that state.

The association has also started acting as a central information collection point for car dealerships and their employees who were displaced by the storm. In addition, several association members are offering jobs or relocation assistance. Dealerships with job openings are urged to contact the NIADA.

The Carolinas Independent Automobile Dealers Association has also started raising money for aid.

Carolinas IADA executive director Jim Edwards said in a release that member Johnny Mitchum had pledged \$500 to the American Red Cross and is challenging his fellow dealers to raise a total of \$20,000 for relief efforts.

He said Marty Martin, Chris Martin and Don Kelly from DMV Wizard had all made donations, as did members of the Carolinas IADA staff.

"We need to do this rapidly," Edwards wrote. "We can certainly raise \$20,000."

The National Automobile Dealers Association is also raising funds through its National Automobile Dealers Charitable Foundation to offer emergency relief to dealership employees who have had personal property lost or damaged by Hurricane Katrina.

The Ohio Automobile Dealers Association kicked off the campaign with a \$50,000 contribution.

Phoenix-based company DriveTime, a chain of buy-here, pay-here stores, donated \$100,000 to the American Red Cross.

"Though we don't have dealerships in any of the affected states, our hearts go out to the families affected by the disaster," said Jon Ehlinger, DriveTime spokesman.

Sean Ryan, CEO of CreditSmart.com, said his company sent out a message to the dealers who use his firm's services to match his personal \$1,000 donation to the American Red Cross.

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Full Story

By Jim Stickford

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