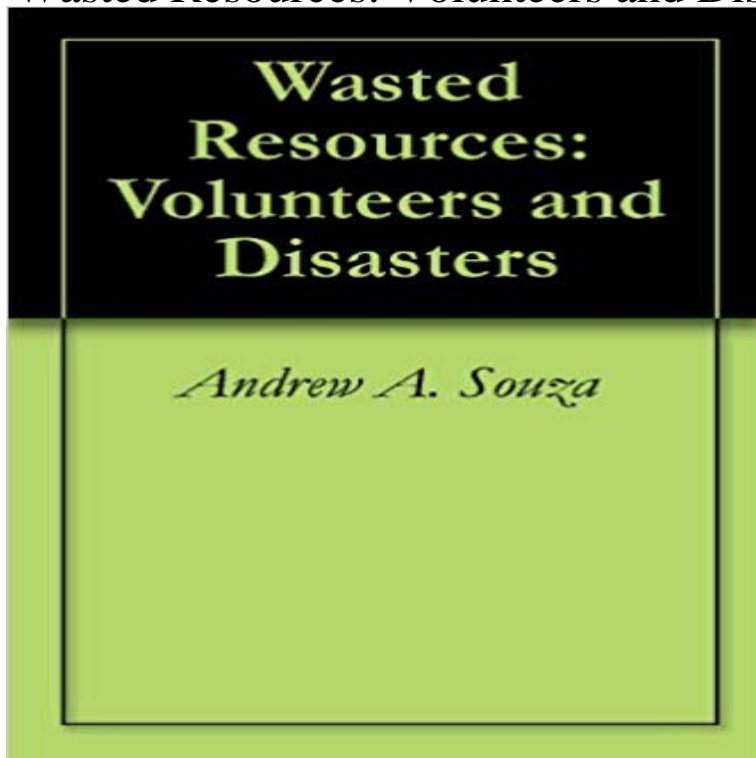


Wasted Resources: Volunteers and Disasters



In the aftermath of the Oklahoma City bombing, a reported 12,000 volunteers arrived to help. Immediately after the 9/11 attacks, an estimated 30,000 volunteers converged on ground zero and the Pentagon. As the weather cleared following Hurricane Katrina, over 60,000 volunteers descended upon Louisiana, Alabama, Texas, and Mississippi to offer assistance. These well-intentioned citizens were both a blessing and a curse. While offering assistance, they also snarled key roads, distracted first responders who were worried about their safety, and created massive accountability and administrative headaches. To address the problem of volunteer convergence at disaster sites, some locales have developed their own unique volunteer in-processing systems, commonly referred to as volunteer reception or volunteer mobilization centers. These systems are developed independently, do not always tie into disaster plans, and are not standardized across the nation. America lacks a national plan for integrating these volunteers and currently has no mechanism for ensuring their credentials across the nation. A national volunteer certification card and database system are needed to better utilize America's most valuable asset, her people, during times of crisis. Empowering and documenting the skills average citizens already possess are the keys to proactively managing volunteers and assigning them where needed.

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