

AFT, Operation Blessing International, AFSCME, Hispanic Federation Launch *Operation Agua* to Provide Safe Water to Puerto Rico Families

Initial Goal of 100,000 Individual Water Filtration Systems, 50 Large-Capacity Safe-Water Devices to Be Crowdsourced by Individuals and Partners

WASHINGTON (October 23, 2017) — Responding to the water crisis in Puerto Rico, the AFT, Operation Blessing International, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees and the Hispanic Federation launched [Operation Agua](#) to crowdsource contributions and provide a reliable source of safe drinking water to families across Puerto Rico.

[Operation Agua's](#) initial goal is to purchase and distribute 100,000 individual water filtration systems for households and classrooms, and 50 large-capacity clean-water devices to a network of nonprofit organizations, union offices, schools, and other community-based groups to provide stable and reliable sources of safe water.

A single \$30 contribution provides an in-home purifier that requires no electricity and provides more than 10 gallons of safe water per day to a family. And \$5,000 delivers a disinfectant generator that can disinfect 150,000 gallons per day—enough safe water for thousands of people.

“People in Puerto Rico are enduring their second month without electricity, safe drinking water or adequate food. This is a national emergency the likes of which I have never seen, and the federal government continues to fail in its responsibility to help our fellow citizens,” said AFT President Randi Weingarten. “When I was in Puerto Rico, I saw children collecting water in contaminated streams; AFT nurses have treated people suffering from dehydration and in danger of contracting deadly diseases from drinking dangerous water; and Puerto Rico’s teachers, many of whom are without water themselves, are working to reopen schools, but these schools need clean drinking water. Operation Agua isn’t a substitute for federal action, which we continue to fight for, but a necessary intervention to get as much clean water as quickly as we can to care for people in serious need.”

The massive damage caused by Hurricane Maria and the lack of electricity and clean water on the island of Puerto Rico continue to threaten the health, safety and lives of millions of American citizens. People are resorting to collecting water in contaminated waterways, or from runoff, and there are reports of some even drinking from toxic Superfund sites. And the danger is not over for those with running water; because water-treatment plants are still not operational, tap water may be tainted with raw sewage.

“Operation Blessing has been working nonstop to help residents of Puerto Rico with a focus on providing safe water, as it remains in critically short supply even a month after the hurricane,” said Operation Blessing International President Bill Horan. “I am ecstatic about the launch of Operation Agua and partnering with the AFT, AFSCME, the Hispanic Federation and other like-minded organizations. The synergistic energy generated by this joint effort will enable us to exponentially expand efforts to provide safe water solutions to vulnerable families all over Puerto Rico.”

This unique coalition brings together relationships with manufacturers, experience providing clean water across the globe, partnerships with shipping and transport workers and corporations, and access to a regional and school-based infrastructure across the island to deliver clean water to people.

“Public service workers are tirelessly struggling to rebuild their communities throughout Puerto Rico, but have not received the support they need from Washington to get the job done,” said AFSCME President Lee Saunders. “AFSCME is proud to join this effort and calls on Congress and the president to listen to the cries for help from their own citizens. The people of Puerto Rico cannot be left behind.”

[Operation Agua](#) will use multiple water purification devices, including:

- The Kohler Clarity Filter, which works on gravity—no electricity is needed—removes over 99 percent of bacteria and protozoa to meet the World Health Organization’s interim-level water-quality guidelines, and one unit can filter up to 10.5 gallons of water per day, meeting the drinking water needs of a typical family;
- The De Nora SANILEC 6 system, which uses an electrolytic process to produce 50 gallons of powerful sodium hypochlorite disinfectant every eight hours, using only 15 pounds of common salt, 50 gallons of water and 110-volt electricity. Each gallon of sodium hypochlorite (chlorine) can disinfect up to 3,000 gallons of otherwise contaminated water;
- The Water Mission Erosion Chlorinator, which uses a simple chlorination technique that allows for consistent dosing using chlorine tablets in a low-maintenance applicator. The unit can disinfect up to 20 gallons per minute and does not require electricity; and
- The Parker Hannifin Aqua Matic and Aqua Whisper Pro 1800-2, which are reverse osmosis water filtration systems capable of purifying salt water (Aqua Matic), brackish or fresh water (Aqua Whisper Pro). Normally used on large boats, these units can purify up to 75 gallons per minute, or 1,800 gallons in 24 hours.

[Operation Agua](#) continues to seek additional partners and financial support. One hundred percent of contributions go to fund the purchasing and delivery of water filtration and purification systems.

ABOUT OPERATION BLESSING INTERNATIONAL:

Operation Blessing International (OBI) is one of the largest charities in America, providing humanitarian services such as strategic disaster relief, medical aid, hunger relief, clean water and community development in 39 countries in the last year. Forbes currently ranks OBI as one of its "100 Largest Charities" with an efficiency rating of 99%. Founded in 1978, Operation Blessing International has touched the lives of more than 321 million people in more than 105 countries and 50 states, providing goods and services valued at over \$4.86 billion.

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