

for faster relief ...

September 2005

They may have made it look easy, but it wasn't. The humanitarian organizations that responded to the tsunami in Asia last December found themselves hard-pressed to meet the demand for relief supplies, according to a new study conducted by the Fritz Institute in partnership with KPMG and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

That study, *Logistics and the Effective Delivery of Humanitarian Relief*, canvassed 100 logisticians from 18 of the world's largest humanitarian organizations to learn more about the challenges they faced. And what it found was that the obstacles went well beyond the collapse of infrastructures in the affected region. Other major hurdles included a shortage of trained

logistics experts, limited automation and a lack of access to information on the ground.

For example, 88 percent of the organizations responding to the survey reported having to relocate their most experienced logisticians from other assignments to staff the tsunami relief efforts. "The small number of trained and experienced logistics professionals in the humanitarian sector has been highlighted in this survey," says Lynn Fritz, director general of the Fritz Institute, "and we have found that many humanitarian logisticians are hoping [this will lead to] a commitment to create a much larger pool of logisticians who will have formal training and professional certification."

A lack of software hampered the relief efforts as well. Of the respondents, only 26 percent said their organizations had access to software that could track and trace incoming shipments of procured goods in the field. Most responding organizations continue to use manual, spreadsheet or "home grown" technologies.

"Humanitarian organizations need [better] information technology solutions ...," says Fritz. "We hope that the prominence of the logistics challenges in the tsunami relief effort will motivate donors and humanitarian sector leadership to expedite their support for creating connectivity between headquarters and the field."