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Consumer Advisory Bulletin (updated August 2007)

Donation Scams in the Wake of a Storm or Disaster

Give generously, but avoid charity fraud in the wake of disaster.

Con-artists have a long record of exploiting people's generosity by siphoning off donations meant to help victims of disaster. Now we need to be cautious in the wake of the floods.

Phony charities cheat donors, hurt legitimate charitable organizations that rely on donations- - and shortchange people who truly need help.

Give generously — but be careful to prevent disaster-related frauds:

- Beware of Internet schemes.** Be very wary of e-mail solicitations that urge you to click on a link to go to a web site and make a donation. The web site may look "legit" and impressive, but it may be phony, and they are simply tricking you into giving your credit card or bank account number. (This is another form of "phishing" scam.)
- Give directly to known, legitimate charities.** Respected charities seeking donations usually are listed in the media. Check them out at the national Better Business Bureau "wise giving" site - www.give.org.
- Ask phone solicitors to send written information.** Check out the charity before you make a decision. Be suspicious if they refuse to send solid information.
- Don't be fooled by "look-alike" names.** Some scams use names that sound impressive and are designed to resemble well-respected organizations.
- Be wary of calls from supposed "law enforcement" or "firefighter" charities.** Contact your local sheriff or police department to check out claims that a donation "will be used locally." Ask if the caller is a paid professional fundraiser, and ask how much of your gift will go to the charitable purpose.
- Don't give your credit card or checking account numbers over the phone to someone you don't know.**

There are many fine charities soliciting contributions in Iowa, and the Attorney General's Office is eager to stop scams and uphold the integrity of our system of giving. If you think you may have been cheated by a fundraising scheme, write to the Attorney General's Office, Consumer Protection Division, Hoover Building, 1305 E. Walnut, Des Moines, Iowa 50319. Call 515-281-5926, or 888-777-4590 toll free. The Web site is: www.iowaAttorneyGeneral.org

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