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## **Scam Alert – February 2010**

by Stacie Harris, Economic Crimes Unit

### **Charity Scams**

The recent earthquake in Haiti has left many in need of help. Many of you are wanting to be the ones to assist them. If you were to query how to make Haiti donations right now on the internet, over 4.5 million links are displayed. This crisis has once again provided an opportunity for thieves to play on people's emotions. How do you tell the difference between a legitimate charitable organization and that everyday thief?

After Hurricane Katrina struck, the Federal Bureau of Investigations estimated that there were over 2300 charitable websites that popped up. Most of the sites were fake and originated outside of the United States.

Many fake charities will often name their organization something closely related to a well-known legitimate organization. These everyday thieves have also been known to use a legitimate organization's logos for their own personal gain.

Before giving out any of your personal information, such as credit card or bank account numbers, be sure to check out the charity with the Better Business Bureau, and your local Secretary of State. You can also check out a charity's rating at Charity Navigator.

- Better Business Bureau website is [www.bbb.org](http://www.bbb.org) . You can search their charity database by selecting the "Charity & Donors section". For those without web access, you may also call them at (866)206-1800.
- Colorado Secretary of State website is [www.sos.state.co.us](http://www.sos.state.co.us) . You will find their charities database under their "Licensing Center". For those without web access, you may also call them at (303)894-2200, Ext. 6409.
- Charity Navigator website is [www.charitynavigator.org](http://www.charitynavigator.org). For those without web access, you may also call them at (201)818-1288

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For charities that are legitimate, be aware that not all of your donation may go for the cause that you believe you are contributing your money to. A percentage of the donations are sometimes placed towards administrative costs to cover advertising, salaries and fundraising. Ask questions to find out what percentage of your donation goes to support the cause, or to those administrative costs; whether the solicitor is a paid fundraiser or a volunteer; where the organization is located and their mailing address. A solicitor of a legitimate charitable organization will have these answers readily available and will be willing to provide them to you without hesitation.

If you are a victim of a charity scam, first contact your local law enforcement agency (police or sheriff) to inform them. File a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) at [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov) or by calling (877)382-4357.

If you are a victim of an online scam, file a complaint with the Internet Crime Complaint Center at [www.ic3.gov](http://www.ic3.gov).

***IDENTIFY A SCAM BEFORE A SCAM IDENTIFIES YOU!***