



BILL THIEBAUT
District Attorney

OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
TENTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT, COLORADO

STACIE HARRIS
Legal Assistant

Scam Alert – July 2010

by Stacie Harris, Economic Crimes Unit

Avoiding Charity Scams

In February of this year, I put out an alert on charity scams that were being reported after the earthquake in Haiti. I feel it is necessary to re-cap this issue once again as not only is the BP oil disaster a potential avenue for charity scams, but hurricane season has started and predictions this year are for 8 to 10 hurricanes to form. Many of you may want to assist those that are in need due to these and other circumstances. These type of crises provide the 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 . 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 . You will find the Colorado charities database under their "Licensing Center". For those without web access, you may also call them at (303)894-2200, Ext. 6409.
- For charities located outside of Colorado, you may check the Charity Navigator website is www.charitynavigator.org. For those without web access, you may 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 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.

IDENTIFY A SCAM BEFORE A SCAM IDENTIFIES YOU!