

FRAUD ALERT!

Possible Scams Linked to Earthquake Relief in Haiti

Attorney General Tom Corbett urged consumers to be watchful for possible financial scams and questionable charitable pleas linked to the massive earthquake in Haiti.

“Natural disasters are often a magnet for scam artists and con-men, hoping to take advantage of well-meaning people who simply want to help victims,” Corbett said. “It is important to help people in need, but consumers should also be watchful for scams and report any suspicious activity.”

Corbett said that one of the most common topics for consumer complaints in these situations is fraudulent disaster-related fundraising efforts.

“A few minutes spent researching various relief organizations can help you avoid scams and also make certain that your charitable contribution will actually be helping the victims of the Haitian earthquake, or other catastrophic events,” Corbett said. “Also, be watchful for look-alike or sound-alike organizations or websites created by scam artists who are hoping to fool unsuspecting consumers.”

Corbett urged consumers to review the following tips if they are considering making a contribution to a disaster-relief agency or other charitable organization:

- Be wary of high-pressure tactics and door-to-door collections.
- If you are making a contribution electronically, be certain you use a secure Internet site.
- Be cautious of “SPAM” email messages that ask you to click on links, open files or download photos (these could contain computer viruses).
- Be skeptical of email messages or posts on social networking sites from people claiming to be foreign officials or surviving victims asking for electronic donations.
- Ask for details about any charity before you make a donation (legitimate charities will always explain their programs and services).
- Check to see if a charity is registered in PA before making a contribution (charity registration info is available on the PA Department of State website at www.dos.state.pa.us).
- Ask for information about how funds will be spent (legitimate charities will tell you what percentage of your gift will go toward community services, operating expenses or fundraising).
- Write checks directly to the charity, rather than giving cash.
- Be watchful for fictitious organizations or websites created by scam artists that are designed to sound or look similar to legitimate relief agencies.

Consumers with questions or problems related to disaster-related fundraising scams can contact the Attorney General’s Consumer Protection Hotline at 1-800-441-2555 or the Bucks County Office of Consumer Protection at 1-215-348-6060. If you are interested in making a donation, please contact your local United Way or visit www.uwbucks.org for donation links.

BUCKS COUNTY CRIMES AGAINST OLDER ADULTS TASK FORCE

Bucks County District Attorney’s Office

215-348-6344

Bucks County Area Agency on Aging

215-348-0510

Bucks County Coroner’s Office

215-348-3852

Network of Victim Assistance (NOVA)

1-800-675-6900

A Woman’s Place (AWP)

1-800-220-8116

Bucks County Office of Consumer Protection

215-348-6060

Bucks County Register of Wills

215-348-6265

US Dept. of Health and Human Services

Investigations, Office of the Inspector General

www.crimesagainstolderadultsbucks.org

24 - HOUR HOTLINE: 1-800-490-8505