

Wisconsin Dept. of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection: Watch for charity scams in aftermath of Hurricane Harvey

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Madison, Wisconsin – The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) is urging consumers to do their research before sending money to a charity claiming to help those affected by Hurricane and Tropical Storm Harvey.

“Scammers see tragedies as a way to line their pockets at the expense of well-meaning citizens,” said Frank Frassetto, Division Administrator for Trade and Consumer Protection. “Give generously to a charity if you are inclined, but always research an organization before sending money.”

Fake charity schemes will use any available means of soliciting “donations” — they may make their pitch over the phone, by mail or online. They will often use names and website addresses that are nearly identical to those of major established charities, so pay close attention to the wording in a donation pitch. Keep in mind that most legitimate charity websites end in “.org” rather than “.com.”

Consider the following tips to protect yourself from charity scammers:

- Watch for social network messages, e-mails or text messages that claim to have exclusive information or photos. Clicking on attachments or clicking links

in these communications can expose your computer or phone to malicious software.

- Look up charities by name at www.charitynavigator.org or www.give.org.
- Use caution with any that popped up since the incident. Research who will administer the funds, how they will be used and if donations are tax-deductible.
- Be leery of high-pressure pitches, and requests to wire money.
- Avoid donating cash or wiring money to people or organizations you don't know.
- If you are donating via a public fundraising website (often called "crowdfunding"), review the site's safety and security policies before making a payment. While these sites typically have a number of safeguards in place for users, understand that there is no way to guarantee that the information posted is completely accurate or truthful.
- If you question the legitimacy of a charity, seek out contact information for the operation rather than using the contact information provided in the pitch or search listing.

Under Wisconsin state law, most organizations soliciting for charitable donations must register and file an annual report with the Department of Financial Institutions (DFI). To check if a charity is registered, visit the [DFI website](#) or email: DFICharitableOrgs@wisconsin.gov.

For additional information or to file a complaint, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at <http://datcp.wi.gov>, send an e-mail to DATCPHotline@wisconsin.gov or call the Consumer Protection Hotline toll-free at [1-800-422-7128](tel:1-800-422-7128).

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