

Consumer Corner

Steering Clear Of Fundraising Scams

(NAPSA)—Thinking about donating to a charity? The Federal Trade Commission, the nation's consumer protection agency, recommends taking these precautions to ensure that your donations benefit the people and organizations you want to help.

- Don't be shy about asking who wants your money. Some charities hire professional fundraisers rather than use their own staff or volunteers, and then use a portion of the donations to pay the fundraiser's fees. If you're solicited for a donation, ask if the caller is a paid fundraiser, who they work for, and the percentage of your donation that will go to the charity and to the fundraiser. If you don't get a clear answer—or if you don't like the answer you get—consider donating to a different organization.

- Contact the office that regulates charitable organizations and solicitations in your state to see if the charity or fundraiser must be registered. If so, check to make sure that the company you're talking to is registered. For a list of state offices, visit the National Association of State Charity Officials at nasconet.org/agencies. The office also can verify how much of your donation goes to the charity, and how much goes to fundraising and management expenses. You also can check out charities with the Better Business Bureau's Wise Giving Alliance (bbb.org/charity) and GuideStar (guidestar.org).

- Trust your gut. Callers may try to trick you by thanking you for a pledge you didn't make. If you don't remember making the donation or don't have a record of your pledge, resist the pressure to give.



There are ways to find out how the money you donate to charity will be spent.

- Be wary of charities that spring up overnight in connection with current events or natural disasters.

- Watch out for similar sounding names. Some phony charities use names that closely resemble those of respected, legitimate organizations.

- Be cautious of promises of guaranteed sweepstakes winnings in exchange for a contribution. According to U.S. law, you never have to make a donation to be eligible to win a sweepstakes.

- Be wary of charities offering to send a courier or overnight delivery service to collect your donation.

- Do not give cash donations. For security and tax record purposes, it's best to pay by check—made payable to the charity, not the solicitor. If you're thinking about giving online, look for indicators that the site is secure, like a lock icon on the browser's status bar or a URL that begins "https:".

For more information, visit ftc.gov/charityfraud.