

Warning About Charity Scams in Wake of Disaster in Japan

Attorney General Bill Schuette today issued a new consumer alert advising Michigan citizens about how to avoid scams when choosing to support disaster relief charities. The alert is relevant to all Americans, and was issued as many consider giving support to charities assisting with recovery efforts after earthquakes and a devastating tsunami in Japan.

"Even during tough times, the people of Michigan give generously to charities that assist disaster victims around the world," said Schuette. "It's important to take steps to ensure your dollars are not lost to fraud and your financial information remains secure."

Schuette noted that scam artists will attempt to exploit the generosity of Michigan citizens in the wake of natural disasters. Criminals may solicit donations for bogus or even legitimate charities, keeping the funds for themselves. Scam artists may also exploit donors' sensitive financial information like credit card and checking account numbers to commit fraud and identity theft.

The Attorney General consumer alert announced today offers advice on how Michigan citizens can avoid scams and safely contribute to critical relief and rebuilding projects, including:

- Be skeptical of unsolicited email requests for donations, even if they appear to be from a legitimate charity. Email is a common method used by thieves to steal personal information, whether through a fake online donation form, or a more sinister computer virus.
- Be skeptical of unsolicited cell phone text messages and social media appeals through sites like Twitter and Facebook. While some charities now accept donations via cell phone and social networking sites, unsolicited requests should be viewed with caution.
- Check up on charities by calling the Attorney General's Charitable Trust Section. Michigan charities must register with the Attorney General's office, and many are required to submit financial information which can be made available to citizens upon request.
- Choose established charitable organizations that have a history of assisting in disasters. The American Red Cross, United Way of America, Catholic Relief Services and the

Salvation Army are just a few of many charities that either give immediate relief or assist in rebuilding communities after disaster.

The consumer alert also advises Michigan citizens on how to protect sensitive financial information and avoid identity theft and fraud. When making a charitable donation, Schuette recommends the following:

- Make your check payable to the organization, never to an individual;
- Request and keep receipts from the organization detailing the amount of your donation, the date and its intended use;
- Use caution before giving credit card numbers over the phone or online. If you are concerned, ask the organization how it will safeguard your financial information; and
- When donating online, ensure you are using a secure web page for financial transactions.

In most cases, secure sites will be preceded by <https://>.