

## News Release

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### Deciding how to give wisely to hurricane victims

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Are you the person on the block who gets called to distribute envelopes in your neighborhood for a charitable contribution? I was glad to learn of resources to check if these organizations are legitimate, and how much of their money actually goes to costs other than administrative. It would be good to clip and save the following information.

The devastation caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita has many people opening their hearts and wallets to help the affected communities in the Gulf Coast. Many people are asking, what is the best way to provide help to those affected by the hurricanes.

The federal government advises that the best way to provide immediate assistance is to donate money directly to established national relief organizations with the experience and means to deliver aid.

Use this advice from the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the nation's consumer protection agency:

Donate to recognized charities you have given to before. Charities that have sprung up overnight lack the infrastructure to provide assistance. Be wary of charities with names that sound like familiar or nationally known organizations, as these could be phony charities. Give directly to the charity, not to solicitors for the charity. Check out any charities before you donate. Contact the Better Business Bureau's Wise Giving Alliance at <http://www.give.org>.

Do not give out personal or financial information-such as your Social Security number or credit card and bank account numbers-to anyone who solicits a contribution from you. Don't give or send cash. For security and tax record purposes, contribute by check or credit card. Write the official name of the charity on your check. You can contribute safely online through national charities like <http://www.redcross.org>.

#### Charity Checklist

Consider the following precautions to ensure that your donation dollars benefit the people and organizations you want to help.

- Ask for written information about the charity, including name, address and phone number, information about the charity's mission, how your donation will be used and proof that your contribution is tax deductible.
- Check out the charity's financial information. See the Charity Check-Up below. Ask for identification. If the solicitor refuses, hang up and report it to law enforcement officials.

- Know the difference between "tax exempt" and "tax deductible." Tax exempt means the organization doesn't have to pay taxes. Tax deductible means you can deduct your contribution on your federal income tax return. Even if an organization is tax exempt, your contribution may not be tax deductible.
- Beware of organizations that use meaningless terms to suggest they are tax exempt charities. For example, an organization can have a "tax I.D. number" and not be a charity; an invoice that tells you to "keep this receipt for your records" doesn't mean that your donation is tax deductible.
- Be skeptical if someone thanks you for a pledge you don't remember making. If you have any doubts about whether you've made a pledge or a previous contribution, check your records.
- Ask how your donation will be distributed. How much will go to the program you want to support (as opposed to other programs of the nonprofit), and how much will cover the charity's administrative and telemarketing costs?
- Refuse any high-pressure appeals.

### Charity Check-Up

Many charities use public donations wisely. Others may spend much of your contribution on administrative expenses or more fund-raising efforts. Some may misrepresent their fund-raising intentions or solicit for phony causes. Before you open your checkbook, check out the charity you're considering donating to by contacting one of these organizations or visiting their web site:

BBB Wise Giving Alliance  
4200 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 800  
Arlington, VA 22203  
(703) 276-0100  
[www.give.org](http://www.give.org)

American Institute of Philanthropy  
3450 Lake Shore Dr., Suite 2802 E  
Chicago, IL 60657  
(773) 529-2300  
[www.charitywatch.org](http://www.charitywatch.org)

GuideStar  
427 Scotland Street  
Williamsburg, VA 23185  
(757) 229-4631  
[www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org)

*Contact Your Local Charity Registration Office In Wisconsin:*

Wisconsin Department of Regulation & Licensing  
1400 E. Washington Ave. Rm 281  
P.O. Box 8935  
Madison, WI 53708-8935  
<http://drl.wi.gov/boards/rco/index.htm>

Department of Justice  
Office of the Attorney General  
123 W. Washington Avenue  
P.O. Box 7857  
Madison, WI 53707-7857  
608-266-1221  
<http://www.doj.state.wi.us/dls/crimlitt.asp> or

To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues, visit <http://www.ftc.gov> or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261.

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