

Disaster Relief Donor Guidelines

Nonprofit organizations across the nation and internationally perform miraculously in very short time frames to provide support to the victims of natural disasters. The Nonprofit Federation urges the generous American public to lend its support to relief efforts by making charitable contributions.

Well-known organizations are highly trustworthy and deserve support as they provide relief over months and years following natural disasters. But we also urge the donating public to blend caution with its generosity. With almost every disaster comes some unscrupulous person, company, or organization that will try to take unfair advantage.

The Nonprofit Federation hopes these guidelines will assist you with your charitable efforts, which are crucial during a state of emergency and in the months after.

1. **LACK OF FINANCIAL INFORMATION FOR THE ORGANIZATION.** For many established organizations, IRS Form 990's (the organization's tax return) are available on-line at www.guidestar.org. An organization should provide you with their annual reports or Form 990 upon request. Ask a new organization how their financial information is currently available. Note that many religious organizations are not required to file the Form 990 — ask them directly how and where their information is currently available.
2. **STATE OFFICIALS MONITOR CHARITABLE ACTIVITY.** Your state attorney general's office can tell you if the organization is registered with the state. If you believe fraudulent activity is taking place, please report it immediately to prevent further harm. Contact information for these offices, including links to the respective Web sites can be found at www.nasconet.org. If your state is not listed, call your attorney general.
3. **LEGITIMATE ORGANIZATIONS WILL TAKE A CHECK AND OFTEN WILL TAKE CREDIT CARDS.** Do not give cash, especially if the organization is offering to pick it up through a courier.
4. **THE ORGANIZATION SHOULD HAVE A PRIVACY POLICY ON THE USE OF PERSONAL INFORMATION.** Ask the organization for its policy. Personal information such as your social security number, your mother's maiden name, and PIN access should not be requested.
5. **"HOW WILL MY CONTRIBUTION BE USED?" IS A LEGITIMATE QUESTION TO ASK.** The organization should provide detailed information up front and a contact reference for after the campaign.
6. **LEGITIMATE ORGANIZATIONS ARE PROFESSIONAL AND COURTEOUS WHEN ASKING FOR YOUR SUPPORT.** Be cautious of high-pressure tactics.
7. **IF YOU ARE CONTACTED BY TELEPHONE, ASK ABOUT THE CALLER'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE ORGANIZATION.** A legitimate organization may use the services of professional fundraisers, volunteers, and staff, depending on the needs of that particular organization, and will assure that fundraisers readily explain who they are and why they are calling. Ask for the caller's callback information and address if there is cause for concern.
8. **FIND OUT WHAT THE CHARITY INTENDS TO DO SHOULD ANY EXCESS CONTRIBUTIONS REMAIN** after they have fully funded the disaster relief activities mentioned.

9. **WHEN DONATING ONLINE, BE CAREFUL OF “SPOOFING,”** which is accomplished by clicking on a link from an e-mail that appears to be sent from a legitimate source. The e-mail may have the logo and even the correct “sent from” source. Furthermore, the site link may even look like the real organization. To avoid this, go to the organization’s web site directly. If you are unsure of the Web address, go to your favorite search engine and enter the organization’s name.
10. **WHEN DONATING ONLINE, MAKE SURE THAT YOU ENTER YOUR PERSONAL INFORMATION ONLY ON A SITE THAT IS SECURED.** Secured sites will have the “lock” icon in your browser.

Finally, and most importantly, do not be deterred from aiding relief and reconstruction efforts. Should a solicitation from an organization you do not know give you pause, send your donation to an organization you do know and trust.