



News from RIEMA

RHODE ISLAND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

645 New London Avenue, Cranston, Rhode Island 02920

www.riema.ri.gov



Donald L. Carcieri, Governor

MG Robert Bray, Director

J. David Smith, Executive Director

Media Advisory

Media Contact:
Steve Kass
(401)462-7127

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Five Tips To Avoid Haiti Relief Scams

The aftermath of natural disasters often bring out the scammers and con artists. Here are five tips to avoid Haiti relief scams and make sure your donations make a difference.

Within 24 hours of the Haitian earthquake, scammers were at work trying to profit from the disaster. The scams ranged from e-mails asking donors for help to phone calls soliciting funds to phony relief websites harvesting credit card numbers.

More than 400 Internet addresses related to Haiti have been registered since Monday's devastating quake. Some of those websites may be legitimate, but many others are fraudulent.

Here are five tips, culled from information from the Federal Bureau of Investigations and the Better Business Bureau, to ensure your donation reaches its destination:

- * Stick to well-known, reputable charities. The American Institute of Philanthropy recently published their list of top Haiti relief organizations, and Charity Navigator evaluates charities with a four-star rating system. The BBB also accredits charities based on fund-raising practices and how the charities spend the funds.
- * Be cautious when donating online. Scammers can put up a website and open a PayPal account overnight, so be wary of donating on sites you don't recognize. Also remember that most nonprofit groups' websites end in .org rather than .com. Don't respond to unsolicited e-mails, and don't click links or open attachments from people you don't know since they may contain computer viruses.
- * Donate to organizations, not individuals. Be skeptical of individuals who approach you - in person, on phone, or via e-mail - asking for money. Some may pose as an official or represent a charity.

* Check the charity out. Find out if it has on-the-ground presence in Haiti, and ask how your funds will be used. If a charity doesn't already have staff in Haiti, it may find it difficult or take a long time to provide immediate assistance.

* Give money, not food, clothing, or equipment. Although well intentioned, donations of food and clothing are inefficient ways to help victims quickly, when transportation and distribution are taken into account. Give money and let the experts determine how best to use it.

Finally, if you think you've been scammed, you can file a complaint with the Internet Crime Complaint Center (if the scam was online) or with the National Fraud Information Center if the scam was over the phone or online.

The Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency (RIEMA) is the state agency responsible for coordinating federal, state, and local resources to protect the public during disasters and emergencies. RIEMA helps develop plans for effective response to all hazards, trains emergency personnel, provides information to families and communities, and assists in recovery from disaster losses. You can learn more about RIEMA by visiting the RIEMA homepage at www.riema.ri.gov