



GIVE WISELY THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

DURING THIS SEASON OF JOY and thanksgiving, many Texans make generous donations to charities by volunteering their time or contributing money. Unfortunately, many criminals are also busy this time of year, devising schemes to take advantage of these feelings of graciousness and kindness, only to serve themselves.

Before you reach for your wallet, ask questions and check the facts. Make sure that your gift is actually going to help the cause to which you have chosen to give. Read about charities in the Charities and Non-Profits section of our Web site <http://www.oag.state.tx.us/>.

Who wants your money? Ask the person asking for your contribution for identification. If you are not familiar with the charitable organization, ask the solicitor for more information or do your own research and review written materials to determine its full name, address and telephone number. Be cautious of similar-sounding names. Copycat organizations may use a name similar to a well-known charity in order to confuse you. They may

send out spam e-mail solicitations that may direct you to what appears to be a legitimate Web site for a charity, when in fact it is a very good imitation. Make sure the charity to which you are giving is the organization you think it is.

How will your donation be used? Don't be fooled by a tearful story or heartbreaking photo. Determine the organization's main goals and ask about their program in detail. Ask for written information that will show you a comparison of how much money the organization spends on administrative and fundraising fees and expenses versus how much it spends directly on the intended recipients or projects of the charity. You may want to compare the administrative costs, fees and expenses for several charities before deciding which charities to support.

Remember to confirm the tax-exempt status of any organization to which you choose to make a donation. Verify whether or not your donation will be tax deductible.

Don't feel pressured to send money right away. A legitimate solicitor will be patient and give you time to do your research. If solicited by phone, do not

give out personal financial information, including your credit card or bank account number, over the phone.

Be smart about making cash donations. For large amounts, write a check in the name of the charity, or if you are giving other property ask for a receipt. Consult an attorney before making a significant gift, whether making such a gift outright, by will or by trust.

Some unscrupulous organizations will offer to send a courier to your house or office for immediate pickup of your donation. Tell them you would like to think about it or that you will mail it to them yourself.

If you aren't sure if an organization is legitimate, contact www.give.org. This website is maintained by the Council of Better Business Bureaus to promote wise charitable giving. You may also file a complaint with the Charitable Trusts Section of my office online at www.oag.state.tx.us/ or by calling 1 (800) 252-8011.

Make your gift count. Take your time, check the facts, and give wisely this holiday season.

POINTS TO REMEMBER



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- Ask for written information on the charity. Find out who is getting your contribution and how the money will be used.
- Don't fall for high-pressure solicitations. Take your time. Write a check, ask for a receipt, or offer to mail in your donation. Do not give out personal information over the telephone.

Read the Texas Attorney General's brochure, Giving to Charities, or file a complaint about an organization in the Charities & Non-Profits Section of our Web site at www.oag.state.tx.us. Find out if a law enforcement, public safety, or veterans organization is registered in the state of Texas:

Corporations Section, Secretary of State
P. O. Box 13697
Austin, TX 78711-3697
(512) 463-5555 or www.sos.state.tx.us

Get assistance on making informed decisions about charitable giving:

The Better Business Bureau
Wise Giving Alliance
www.give.org

The American Institute of Philanthropy
www.charitywatch.org



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