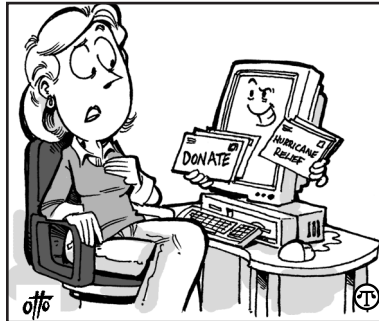




Crime Watch

Avoiding "Hurricane Fraud"

(NAPS)—There are ways to protect yourself from hurricane fraud, fake charities and criminals who seek to profit from disasters.



People donating to hurricane relief should be sure they know what charity they're dealing with.

"Americans have traditionally supported relief efforts in times of disasters. We cannot let criminals exploit these acts of kindness," said Chief Postal Inspector Lee Heath.

Postal Inspectors have joined the FBI, FTC and the Department of Justice as part of the new federal Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force. The force was created to deal with and prevent disaster-related federal crimes, such as charity fraud, identity theft, fraudulent benefit claims and insurance fraud.

With bogus Web sites popping up on the Internet, potential donors are urged to:

- Avoid cash gifts. Use a check or credit card.
- Check out the charity, organization or company before giving.
- Watch out for solicitations that come from a company that sounds like a well-known charity.

If you suspect a disaster-related fraud, report it to www.IC3.gov or 1-877-FTC-HELP.

Did You Know?

Postal Inspectors have joined the FBI, FTC and the Department of Justice as part of the new federal Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force. The force was created to deal with and prevent disaster-related federal crimes, such as charity fraud, identity theft, fraudulent benefit claims and insurance fraud. If you suspect a disaster-related fraud, report it to www.IC3.gov or 1-877-FTC-HELP.