



NEWSRELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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BETTER WATCH OUT FOR CHARITABLE SCAMS DURING THE HOLIDAYS

You better watch out. You better not cry. The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' (VDACS) Office of Consumer Affairs (OCA) is telling you why. Scam artists may be coming to town.

During the holiday season, fraud may try to take its place along with other more festive traditions. Although most charitable solicitations are legitimate, crooks may try to take advantage of the spirit of giving to grab some donations for themselves. With solicitations coming via mail, phone, e-mail, and in person, it is difficult to avoid them. OCA wants people to know in advance what to look for and how to respond when they are asked to make a donation.

Disreputable groups may use names that sound like those of highly regarded charities to trade on their good reputations; they may pressure consumers for a quick decision; or some could offer an especially touching, but unsubstantiated, story to elicit sympathy and contributions. In the hustle and bustle of the holidays, consumers may be too busy and overwhelmed to notice.

Unfortunately, giving to questionable groups not only takes money away from truly worthwhile causes, it also swells the coffers of the undeserving and the unlawful, so it's very important for consumers to donate wisely.

To help in that effort, OCA has devised a list of Ten Tips for Giving when making donations to charities:

1. Know the charity. Never give to a charity unless you know its history, purpose and reputation.
2. Listen closely to the name of the charity. Before contributing, be sure the name is the one you know and respect.
3. Do not give in to pressure. Legitimate organizations do not expect you to contribute immediately if you are unfamiliar with their services.
4. Don't be fooled by a hard-luck tale. Base contributions on factual, relevant information only.
5. Request information. The majority of telephone solicitation calls are done by professional solicitors who often receive 70 to 90 percent of each contribution, so it is important to ask how much of your donation will be spent on fund-raising and administration versus how much will actually support the organization's charitable purpose.

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6. Listen for disclosures. By law, telephone solicitors are required to tell you the name of the company which employs them and that they are paid to solicit. Be suspicious of anyone who does not volunteer this information.
7. Examine gift offers. Mail solicitations often come with a small gift such as greeting cards or personalized address labels. The charity sometimes implies that the gift is yours to keep only if you make a donation. State law, however, specifies that unless you asked for the item, it is yours to keep without making a contribution.
8. Verify registration with OCA. State law requires that, except for certain exempt groups, organizations that solicit contributions in Virginia must register with the OCA. Access the Consumer Portal www.vdacs.virginia.gov/consumers/index.shtml and click on “Charitable Search.”
9. Request identification. When solicited in person, always ask to see identification for both the solicitor and the charity.
10. Do not give cash. Instead, write a check payable to the charity, not the individual solicitor.

For additional information about charities and charitable solicitations, call the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services’ consumer protection hotline, toll-free in Virginia, at 1-800-552-9963, or in the Richmond area, dial 804/786-1343.

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