



# United States Army Criminal Investigation Command

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



## Army CID Warns of Disaster Fraud Scams

**QUANTICO, VA.** (Aug. 31, 2017) – The U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command is cautioning the Army community to be on the lookout for charitable schemes and scams associated with “Disaster Fraud” donations.

With these scams, criminals will use man-made or natural catastrophes, such as the recent damage and flooding caused by Hurricane Harvey, to get individuals to donate to charities claiming to support affected victims. Some of these organizations are fraudulent, or misleading at best because they do not have the infrastructure to support the affected disaster area.

Disasters can also lead to an increase in fraudulent fundraisers, monetary and charitable donations scams and scammers will use various methods to seek “charitable donations.” According to CID officials, “scammers exploit those wishing to assist people in need by soliciting fictitious charitable donations, making phone calls, sending fraudulent emails or creating phony websites to solicit contributions or personal information resulting in identity theft.”

“Do not respond to unsolicited email (spam), links or attachments from these fake groups because in addition to stealing your identity, these links may also contain computer viruses and/or hijack your computer files for ransom,” CID agents warn.

The scammers will also focus on getting their victims to become emotionally invested to help those in need. Special Agents from CID recommend that people who want to give do research before donating. Ask detailed questions about the charity or organization, which includes basic information such as their name, address, telephone number, and if the charity is registered. Also request proof that a contribution is tax deductible or if the organization is tax exempt. Be cautious of out of state organizations – especially if their address is a post office box.

Officials also urge would-be-givers to ensure monies are donated to trustworthy organizations and make contributions directly to known and verified organizations rather than relying on a third party to do so.

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Experts also advise that copycat websites are very active during natural disasters. Copycat websites will have links that will appear authentic to similar known web addresses. It's the same for some social media platforms. An increased use of social media platforms using copycat websites and accounts of trusted organizations will be used to display devastating and emotional images combined with a link in an effort to get you to donate to those in need.

If you decide to donate, go directly to the organization's website and do not donate using a link that has been sent via email or social media, CID advises. Be sure to check the organization's verification. Most sites use a check mark behind the name to let you know that you are on or viewing a verified account.

Additionally, some crowdfunding and fundraising websites and accounts may not be used for the intended purpose of helping disaster victims, so beware of solicitations from these sites posing as legitimate and fake organizations. It is important to verify all organizations before donating.

If you think you've been the victim of a charity scam, you can file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission.

## **Resources**

**National Center for Disaster Fraud:** (866) 720-5721

**Department of Homeland Security / FEMA Fraud Hotline:** (800) 323-8603

<https://www.oig.dhs.gov>

**Federal Trade Commission:** <https://www.ftccomplaintassistant.gov/#&panel1-1>

### **State:**

TX: [FraudReport@tdi.texas.gov](mailto:FraudReport@tdi.texas.gov)

1-888-327-8818

### **Helpful Links:**

- <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0074-giving-charity>
- <http://www.abcactionnews.com/news/local-news/how-to-avoid-hurricane-harvey-charity-scams-and-make-sure-your-money-gets-to-victims-who-need-help>
- FTC Consumer information release:  
<https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/blog/2017/08/wise-giving-wake-hurricane-harvey>
- Directory of national charities: <http://give.org/charity-reviews/national>

*Editor's note: Some information contained in this advisory is courtesy of the FBI, the National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) and the National White Collar Crime Center.*

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*For more information on CID or to report a felony-level crime or provide information concerning a crime, contact your local CID Office or the Military Police or visit [www.cid.army.mil](http://www.cid.army.mil).*