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Tsunami Relief Aid: How To Avoid Becoming A Scam Victim

By Marketing Basics

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Tens of thousands have been killed—thousands more are missing and injured—in the largest earthquake to strike the globe since 1964, causing devastating tsunami waves.

Unfortunately, when disaster strikes, con artists invariably rear their ugly heads to try and take advantage of the situation.

In this article, we're going to show you how to avoid becoming a scam victim, when donating to charities for the tsunami relief effort.

To begin with, the best advice we can give you is, "go with who you know!" In other words, donate only to those charities that you're familiar with and that have been around for a while.

A few of the charities we recommend that fall into that category include:

American Red Cross National Headquarters
2025 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20006
Phone: (202) 303-4498
Disaster Assistance info: (866) GET-INFO (866-438-4636)
To make a donation: (800) HELP-NOW (800-435-7669)
<http://www.redcross.org>

Oxfam America
26 West Street
Boston, MA 02111
For general questions about Oxfam's work or to make a donation, please call:
In the US: 800-77-OXFAM (800-776-9326)
Outside the US: 617-482-1211

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<http://www.oxfamamerica.org>

AmeriCares Foundation
88 Hamilton Ave
Stamford, CT 06902
1-800-486-HELP (4357)
<https://www.americaresfoundation.net/>

UNICEF House
3 United Nations Plaza
New York, New York 10017
212-326-7000 – Switchboard UNICEF House

<http://www.unicefusa.org>

In addition Network for Good is an online resource for all types of legitimate and registered non-profit organizations, including your favorite charities:

Network For Good
8615 Westwood Center Dr.
Suite 1A
Vienna, VA 22182
Phone: 703-265-3683
<http://www.networkforgood.org/>

Listed below are some tips to aid you in giving safely both online and offline:

1. Make sure you have the exact name of the organization. Some charities or charity web sites have names that sound similar and you need to make sure it's a legitimate nonprofit. Before you give online you should be familiar with the name and reputation of the charity you intend to support. If in doubt check with your local United Way or Community Information Center, they may be familiar with the charity.
2. Only give to charities recognized by the appropriate governmental body in their respective country. Look for the charity to explain their tax -- exempt nonprofit (NGO) status in a FAQ or similar area of their web site. You should also be aware that some advocacy organizations are not allowed by law to issue tax deductible receipts, you may still wish to support their work, however our advice is to understand before you make the gift what type of tax receipt you can expect.
3. Any legitimate charity seeking your support via the Internet or offline will give you ample opportunities to ask

questions and to learn about their mission. In the US you can learn a lot about a charity by ask for the document the charity files with IRS each year called the 990 Form. Nonprofit organizations are required by law to provide this information when asked. If you prefer you can find a copy already posted online at <http://www.guidestar.org>

4. Make sure the charity site uses encryption technology that ensures appropriate security for online donations and data transmission. Before entering any information you consider sensitive (i.e. credit card number, personal identification data, etc), verify that the page requesting your credit card information is secure (encrypted). The letters <https://>—rather than <http://>— should precede the page's URL and/or there should be an unbroken key or padlock symbol located in the corner of the web browser. If in doubt, contact the charity by telephone or by e–mail before you provide the information online.

5. The Internet provides tremendous opportunities to support the charity of your choice directly. Don't get taken in

by "charity" or "someone is in need" chain letters. E–mails that claim money will go to a specified charity each time the message is forwarded are not true. If your charity does not provide online giving opportunities at their web site, consider giving through Network for Good which provides all registered charities in the U.S. the ability to receive online donations.

6. Check for a privacy policy concerning the use of your name, e–mail address or other personal information. Don't disclose personal information, such as your address, telephone number, social security number, or e–mail address —unless you know who's collecting the information and how they plan to use it.

7. Print a copy of the final confirmation screen that appears when you have made your gift. In addition, keep a copy of your charitable gift confirmation e–mail for your records. If you do not receive a confirmation of the gift by e–mail (and in most cases by mail as well), do not give to that charity online again, until you are certain they have brought their online solicitation policies inline with these tips. In such cases, contact the charity to make sure they received your gift and request confirmation of the gift.

8. A reputable charity will make certain fullcontact information is readily available in case you need assistance with questions, problems, or service. The charity should provide one or more ways to reach them off line as well as communicate with them directly online. Look for the charity's contact address, telephone, e–mail address, etc.

9. The Internet provides charities with an opportunity to share more of their work with you the donor. You should be able to learn how the charity you contribute to plans to use the money you give to help others and fulfill their mission. If you are not certain how the charity will use your charitable gift, ask!

10. Your favorite charity should provide you an opportunity to hear about their work regularly. On their web site or through e-mail updates the charity should provide information about how they fulfill their stated mission. These updates should be received on a regular basis and should not be tied only to requests for contributions.

In closing, with so much publicity and attention being given to the tsunami disaster, it's easy to forget we have tens of thousands of needy families right here in our own country. Please don't forget about them.

Also, we've been hearing on the news that many Americans have been inquiring about how they can adopt a homeless Southeast Asian child.

Again, please don't forget, we have tens of thousands of homeless children right here in our own country. If you want to adopt, why not consider our own children first?

How To Avoid Scam Artist When Donating To Tsunami Relief

By Richard A. Chapo

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Millions of people have shown their true character by making cash donations to charitable groups providing relief to those devastated by the Tsunami. While your actions are a shining example of the best traits of people, a few unsavory groups are trying to make a profit off of the tragedy.

You can avoid these scam artists by taking a few simple steps. Charitable organizations rely on tax-deductible contributions as their primary funding source. Before an organization can offer the benefit of a tax deduction for donations, it must be classified as such by the Internal Revenue Service. The process is arduous and effectively acts as an informal investigation of the legitimacy of the charitable organization in question. Fortunately, the IRS makes this information available to the public.

You can check the legitimacy of a charitable organization by

either contacting the IRS or accessing the agency list of charitable organizations on the Internet as follows:

IRS Customer Service: 1-800-829-1040

<http://apps.irs.gov/app/pub78>

The above link to the IRS takes you to a page where you can conduct a publication 78 search. Publication 78 is a list of all charitable organizations that have qualified for tax-exempt status with the IRS. Scam artist and unsavory characters are not going to be listed with the IRS. If the organization you are considering does not appear in Publication 78, you may wish to consider another organization that is on the list.

E-mail Scams

You should be cautious if you receive an e-mail requesting money for the relief effort. The e-mail may not be from a legitimate organization. Fraudulent e-mail campaigns are at an unbelievable level. If you are determined to make a contribution because of an e-mail you received, make sure

that you check out the organization with the IRS as indicated above.

Unfortunately, there is a second problem with responding to an e-mail solicitation for monetary donations. Assume that you regularly make donations to a large charity organization and you receive a request for a donation from that organization to help with the tragedy in Asia. You can safely click the link in the email and make a donation, correct? Maybe not. There is still a risk that the email is a scam. Many online businesses have ongoing problems with scam artists copying their sites, logos, headings, etc., and sending e-mail solicitations to scam individuals. There is no reason to believe that charitable organizations would be any less of a target, so be careful.

A third and final problem exists with email solicitations for donations. Most people incorrectly assume that when they see a familiar domain name in the body of an email, it means the email is legitimate. Domain names can easily be faked through a domain name masking program. It gets a bit

technical, but just keep in mind that domain name in the body of an email means little.

If you still compelled to respond to an email solicitation with a donation, you should use a search engine to search for the organization listed in the email. Once you click on to the site, you can make your donation in confidence.

You donations make a world of difference for so many people in need. By following the above recommendations, you can make sure that your donation is made to a legitimate charitable organization.

Richard Chapo is CEO of <http://www.businessstaxrecovery.com> – Obtaining tax refunds for small businesses by finding overlooked tax deductions and credits through a free tax return review. He can be reached at richard@businessstaxrecovery.com.



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