



## LANCASTER CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT

# NEWS RELEASE

City of Lancaster  
Bureau of Police, 39 West Chestnut Street, Lancaster, Pa. 17603  
[www.lancasterpolice.com](http://www.lancasterpolice.com)

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Contact Number: (866) 720-5721

Date: March 15, 2011

### Natural Disaster Charities

During times of natural disasters, charities ramp up their efforts to maximize donations. Unfortunately, criminals can exploit these tragedies for their own gain by sending fraudulent e-mails and creating phony websites designed to solicit contributions. In a press release yesterday, the Federal Bureau of Investigation reminds the public to use caution when making donations in the aftermath of natural disasters.

The FBI and the National Center for Disaster Fraud have an existing tip line to receive information from the public about suspected fraud associated with the earthquake and tsunami that affected Japan. Tips should be reported to the National Center for Disaster Fraud, (866) 720-5721. The line is staffed by a live operator 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Additionally, e-mails can be sent to [disaster@leo.gov](mailto:disaster@leo.gov), and information can be faxed to (225) 334-4707.

The National Center for Disaster Fraud was created by the Department of Justice to investigate, prosecute, and deter fraud in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, when billions of dollars in federal disaster relief poured into the Gulf Coast region. Now, its mission has expanded to include suspected fraud from any natural or man-made disaster.

The public is reminded to perform due diligence before giving contributions to anyone soliciting donations or individuals offering to provide assistance to the people of Japan. Solicitations can originate from e-mails, websites, door-to-door collections, flyers, mailings, telephone calls, and other similar methods.

Before making a donation of any kind, consumers should adhere to certain guidelines, including:

- \* Do not respond to any unsolicited (spam) incoming e-mails, including clicking links contained within those messages because they may contain computer viruses.
- \* Be skeptical of individuals representing themselves as members of charitable organizations or officials asking for donations via e-mail or social networking sites.
- \* Beware of organizations with copy-cat names similar to but not exactly the same as those of reputable charities.
- \* Rather than follow a purported link to a website, verify the legitimacy of nonprofit organizations by utilizing various Internet-based resources that may assist in confirming the group's existence and its nonprofit status.



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- \* Be cautious of e-mails that claim to show pictures of the disaster areas in attached files because the files may contain viruses. Only open attachments from known senders.
- \* To ensure contributions are received and used for intended purposes, make contributions directly to known organizations rather than relying on others to make the donation on your behalf.
- \* Do not be pressured into making contributions; reputable charities do not use such tactics.
- \* Be aware of whom you are dealing with when providing your personal and financial information. Providing such information may compromise your identity and make you vulnerable to identity theft.
- \* Avoid cash donations if possible. Pay by credit card or write a check directly to the charity. Do not make checks payable to individuals.
- \* Legitimate charities do not normally solicit donations via money transfer (wire) services.
- \* Most legitimate charities websites end in .org rather than .com.

Consumers can also report suspicious e-mail solicitations or fraudulent websites to the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center, [www.ic3.gov](http://www.ic3.gov) <<http://www.ic3.gov>>.

*(end of release)*