

Monday March 14, 2011 8:23 PM PDT

With crisis comes fraud. How you can help Japan (and yourself)

Best wishes to the Los Angeles County Fire Department Technical Services Division - California Task Force 2, who are in Japan assisting with the earthquake and tsunami recovery efforts. You can follow them at <http://fire.lacounty.gov/> and on Twitter @LACoFDTSD

Meanwhile, many members of the public want to help too. Experts indicate that the best donation is money so that supplies can be purchased close to the affected areas. This saves on transportation costs and logistics.

Unfortunately, while many people are extending a helping hand, criminals use the opportunity to cheat and steal from those who are trying to help those in need.

The following three sections will help you make a better decision on how to provide help to others while protecting yourself, if you decide to assist:

1. Protect yourself from fraud

A. The Federal Trade Commission, the nation's consumer protection agency, has provided a "charity checklist" to advise consumers about donating wisely to charities.

If you are asked to contribute to a charity, you should:

- a. Ask for the name of the charity if the telemarketer does not provide it promptly;
- b. Ask what percentage of your donation will support the cause described in the solicitation;
- c. Verify that the charity has authorized the solicitation;
- d. Do not provide any credit card or bank information until you have reviewed all information from the charity and made the decision to donate;
- e. Ask for a receipt showing the amount of the contribution and stating that it is tax deductible; and
- f. Avoid cash gifts. For security and tax record purposes, it's best to pay by check - made payable to the beneficiary, not the solicitor.

The FTC works to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop, and avoid them. To file a complaint or get free information on consumer issues, visit www.ftc.gov or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261. Watch a new video, How to File a Complaint, at ftc.gov/video to learn more.

The FTC enters consumer complaints into the Consumer Sentinel Network, a secure online database and investigative tool used by more than 1,800 civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.

B. The State of California Department of Justice, Office of the California Attorney General, regulates charities and the professional fundraisers who solicit on their behalf. The purpose of this oversight is to protect charitable assets for their intended use and ensure that the charitable donations contributed by Californians are not misapplied and squandered through fraud or other means. The main elements of the Attorney General's regulatory program are found as the following link:

<http://oag.ca.gov/charities>

Charity Research Tool

A searchable database of the information returns that charities file annually with the IRS is available on the Attorney General's website. The database allows donors to research a charity before making a decision to give:

<http://oag.ca.gov/charities/charity-research-tool#Location:Default>

2. What and where to donate

If you are looking for a list of non profit charities that are working with the Japanese government, visit the U.S. Agency for International Development, or USAID, at

www.usaid.gov

In response to the earthquake and Tsunami in Japan, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is dispatching a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) and has mobilized its partners, the Fairfax County Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Team and the Los Angeles County Search and Rescue Team. Each USAR team will be composed of approximately 72 personnel, search and rescue canines and approximately 75 tons of rescue equipment. The USAR teams will be accompanied by USAID disaster experts who will assist with assessments of the situation.

3. How you can help

Following a major disaster, most relief organizations and emergency responder agencies are extremely busy, even if they are outside the affected area. Organizations can become overwhelmed with too many volunteers. The best time to sign-up to volunteer is during a non-disaster time. This allows you to train with a disaster relief organization to be ready when the next emergency strikes.

To find a training or volunteer opportunity go to www.CaliforniaVolunteers.org and enter your zip code, select "Public Safety and Disaster Preparedness" from the pull down menu. You will receive a list of potential opportunities in your area, such as joining a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT).

For more information about fraud, becoming a volunteer, and USAID's emergency humanitarian assistance programs, please visit the following websites:

FRAUD

<http://www.stopfraud.gov/protect-massmarket.html>

<http://ag.ca.gov/consumers/general.php>

<http://sheriff.lacounty.gov/wps/portal/lasd/crimeprevention/fraudandidentitytheft>

DONATIONS

www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/disaster_assistance/

<http://www.usaid.gov/cgi-bin/goodbye?http://www.interaction.org/crisis-list/interaction-members-support-japan-earthquake-response>

<http://www.redcross.org/>

VOLUNTEERING

http://californiavolunteers.org/index.php/disaster_volunteering/detail2

<http://www.cert-la.com/index.shtml>

Deputy Robert Boese III
Captain Mike Parker
Sheriff's Headquarters Bureau - Newsroom
Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department
(323) 267-4800
SHBNewsroom@lasd.org
www.lasd.org

Leroy D. Baca, Sheriff
Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department

LA Crime Stoppers: Partner to prevent or report crimes against people or animals by contacting your local sheriff's station or police department. Or if you wish to remain Anonymous, call "LA Crime Stoppers" by dialing 800-222-TIPS (8477), texting the letters TIPLA plus your tip to CRIMES (274637), or using the website <http://lacrimestoppers.org>

To receive more detailed, up-to-date information directly from the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) via e-mail, register for "Nixle" alerts at www.Nixle.com or more directly at <https://local.nixle.com/register/> and register for "LASD – Headquarters Newsroom (SHB), Los Angeles County Sheriff" and your local LASD station area. Or, text your zip code to 888777 to receive text alerts only. Standard text messaging rates may apply depending on your calling plan.



For full details, go to https://local.nixle.com/alert/4666426/?sub_id=207867.

To manage your text and email settings, please log into your account at <https://local.nixle.com/accounts/login/>.

Powered by **nixle**. © 2011 Nixle, LLC. All rights reserved.