Check Before Donating To Disaster Relief Funds

In the wake of Hurricane Michael, many well-meaning people may feel compelled to help those affected with financial donations. The Federal Trade Commission urges people to learn how to make sure their donations are used for the intended purposes.

How does this scam work?

Hurricane Michael caused much devastation to the Florida Panhandle and other parts of the Southeast, and people locally and across the country may want to show support, often financially. Scammers take advantage of those generous intentions and exploit disasters and tragedies by stealing donations. Sometimes scammers call and email potential victims and falsely claim to be representing a well-known charity, and then try to pressure victims into donating to a phony disaster or tragedy relief fund.

How can I protect myself?

Never pay by wire transfer or gift card. Credit card and check donations are safer. Donate to well-known, established charities that have a history of providing disaster relief. Go directly to the organization's website or call directly to ensure you are donating to the intended organization.

Be alert about charities that seem to have sprung up overnight following a disaster. This could be a scam by someone trying to take advantage of the situation. You can research the organization with the Better Business Bureau's Wise Giving Alliance, Charity Navigator, Charity Watch or GuideStar.

If you receive an email with a request for disaster-relief donations, do not click on any links in the email unless you are sure you know who it is from.

What if I'm a victim?

Always report all scams and fraud to your local law enforcement agency's non-emergency number. If you believe someone is in danger, call 911. Report all scams and financial abuse to the state attorney general, and file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission at ftc.gov/complaint.