Make Sure You’re Donating To a Legitimate Relief Group

As natural disasters happen around the country, the Federal Trade Commission encourages consumers to make sure their donations are going to the right places.

How does this scam work?
In the wake of natural disasters and tragedies, people around the country are compelled to help, 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.

Other times, they create phony charity organizations and they pocket any donations instead of using the money to support what donors thought was the intended cause.

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.