



# Consumer Affairs Tabloid



## Keeping you in the "KNOW"

287- CITY

Army Community Service Financial Readiness Branch

Jun 2009



**Excerpt from: The Better Business Bureau**

**Donating to Police and Firefighter Organizations** [www.bbb.org/us/Police-Firefighter-Charities](http://www.bbb.org/us/Police-Firefighter-Charities)

The Police and Firefighters in your community are people who put their lives on the line to protect you, your family, and your community. So when you get a call or a letter asking you to give to a police or firefighter group, your first reaction is probably a generous one.

But wait. There are a lot of hype merchants out there, fast talking hucksters only too happy to take your dollars without giving you all the facts needed to make an informed giving decision. If you donate to groups like these your hardworking local police or firefighters might not be helped much, if at all. And you'll have poured your hard-earned money down the drain.

If you know the kinds of appeals that have caused problems in the past, you will be able to spot some of the groups you should question closely. People like yourself have told us they've had problems in situations like these:

Jane Jones lives in Your County, USA, where she is active in community affairs. When she received an invitation in the mail to become an honorary member of the Your County Sheriff's Association, she paid the \$20 membership fee and proudly displayed the Association's blue and gold sticker on her car's windshield. Jane was later disappointed to find that friends at her local Sheriff's office had never heard of the organization or its activities...and she wondered who belonged to it. (See link for additional situations)

For information about national police or firefighter organizations, visit the Alliance's web site, [www.bbb.org/charity](http://www.bbb.org/charity), or contact the BBB Wise Giving Alliance, 4200 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 800, Arlington, VA 22203.

For information on how to protect yourself, asking the right questions, finding out if you can deduct your contributions, and making your decision please read the complete article.



**Excerpt from: The Attorney General of Texas**

Attorney General's Office Launches Web Tool Giving Public Greater Access to Information about Non-Profits Benefiting Law Enforcement. [www.oag.state.tx.us/oagNews/release.php?id=2994](http://www.oag.state.tx.us/oagNews/release.php?id=2994)

The Web-based search tool launched today reflects Attorney General Abbott's focus on transparency and openness, as well as his ongoing efforts to ensure that charitable organizations fulfill their stated charitable purpose.

By accessing the new online resource at [www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/consumer/letsa/index.php](http://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/consumer/letsa/index.php), Texans can search for an organization or view a list of all organizations that have registered with the Texas Attorney General's Office, which is required by the Texas Law Enforcement Telephone Solicitation Act (LETSA). The financial information that is accessible on the new Web page has been compiled from the organizations' registration statements and related attachments.

In January, Attorney General Abbott launched an online search function that allows Texans to access financial information about Texas charitable organizations. To access the online Charity Search, visit the Attorney General's Web site at [www.oag.state.tx.us/consumer/charitysearch\\_info.shtml](http://www.oag.state.tx.us/consumer/charitysearch_info.shtml). (Click on the name to receive percentage breakdowns of public contributions, management and general expenses, fundraising expenses, etc.

**Excerpt from: The Federal Trade Commission**  
Helping Family and Friends Avoid Charity Fraud  
[www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/telemarketing/tell18.shtm](http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/telemarketing/tell18.shtm)

## Charity Checklist

Consider the following precautions to ensure that your donation dollars benefit the people and organizations you want to help. They're good practices — whether you're contacted by an organization's employees, volunteers or professional fundraisers — and whether they solicit donations by phone, mail, online, or in person.

- *Be wary of charities that spring up overnight in connection with current events and natural disasters.*
- *Ask for written information* about the charity, including name, address, and telephone number.
- *Check to see if the charity or fundraiser must be registered in your state* by contacting the office that regulates charitable organizations and charitable solicitations.
- *Don't be shy about asking who wants your money.* Some charities hire professional fundraisers for large-scale mailings, telephone drives, and other solicitations, rather than their own staff or volunteers. They use a portion of the donations to pay the fundraiser's fees.
- *Call the charity.* Find out if the organization is aware of the solicitation and has authorized the use of its name. If not, you may be dealing with a scam artist.
- *Watch out for similar sounding names.* Some phony charities use names that closely resemble those of respected, legitimate organizations.
- *Make a note on your desk or wall calendar when you donate.*
- *Be cautious of promises of guaranteed sweepstakes winnings in exchange for a contribution.*
- *Be wary of charities offering to send a courier or overnight delivery service* to collect your donation immediately.
- *Discuss the donation with a trusted family member or friend* before committing the funds.
- *Know the difference between "tax exempt" and "tax deductible."* Tax exempt means the organization doesn't have to pay taxes. Tax deductible means you can deduct your contribution on your federal income tax return.



### **From the Files of Fort Hood's Consumer Affairs Office**

Usually when I receive a call from a charity I tell them I donate through Army Emergency Relief or the Combined Federal Campaign. There have been a few occasions I asked the person calling a few questions. Some solicitors have told me the truth about their company's some have not and instead stated 100% of what I send in will go to the cause. Instead of committing over the phone or making a pledge I ask them to send a brochure in the mail with the company's financial statements. Can you guess how many letters I have received during the last five years with this information? If you guessed zero then you are correct and obviously it's hard to pull the wool over your eyes.

Army Community Service, Financial Readiness Branch offers an Consumer Savvy class once a month or by request. This class covers purchasing a car and auto repairs, dispelling myths and avoiding scams, consumer laws, and many other subjects. Call 287-8979 to schedule a class for your unit or family readiness group.

Back issues of the Consumer Affairs Tabloid are available on the Financial Readiness section of the ACS website at [www.hoodmwr.com/acs](http://www.hoodmwr.com/acs).