

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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## **ATTORNEY GENERAL, SECRETARY OF STATE ASK COLORADO TO BEWARE OF SCAM ARTISTS EXPLOITING HAITI DISASTER**

DENVER — Colorado Attorney General John Suthers and Colorado Secretary of State Bernie Buescher warned Coloradans today to be wary of unregistered charities or other entities attempting to use the earthquake in Haiti, which has left thousands dead and the island nation devastated, to scam consumers.

“Coloradans have demonstrated a tremendous capacity for generosity during past disasters, but even the best intentioned donors should take precautions to ensure they are not victims of fraud,” Suthers said. “Scam artists often use disasters to take advantage of the generosity of those who simply want to help.”

“Undoubtedly, our hearts go out to the victims of this disaster,” Buescher said. “Coloradans can maximize their contributions and aid to this tragedy by only giving to established, legitimate charities or by checking the charity first on our Web site.”

Suthers and Buescher said Coloradans can take several simple steps to make sure that their charitable contributions are helping disaster victims and not lining the pockets of scam artists:

- Visit the [www.checkthecharity.com](http://www.checkthecharity.com) or the Colorado Secretary of State's Web site ([www.sos.state.co.us](http://www.sos.state.co.us)) to make sure a charity soliciting contributions is registered with the state.
- Seniors can contact AARP ElderWatch via the Colorado Consumer Line, 1-800-222-4444, for more information on charity fraud.
- Ask for the solicitor's registration number and the registration number of the charity he or she is representing.
- If the charity is required to file the federal form 990 or 990-EZ with the IRS, ask to see it.
- Ask your tax advisor or the Internal Revenue Service if your donation will be tax deductible. The fact that a charity has a tax identification number does not necessarily mean your contribution is tax-deductible.
- Ask the solicitor how much or what percentage of the donation will go to the charity.
- Be wary if the charity does not want to provide information about its programs and finances. Reputable charities will gladly provide the information requested.
- Watch out for charities with names that sound similar to well-known organizations. Sometimes these sound-alike names are simply intended to confuse donors.
- Do not pay in cash. Donate with a check made payable to the charity.
- If solicited in person, ask to see identification for both the solicitor and the charity.
- Certain well-known charities such as the Red Cross will never solicit donations over the phone.
- Beware of unsolicited e-mail. There have already been reports of e-mail that purport to be solicitations from the Red Cross. The e-mails have links embedded in them that will take you to a fake Red Cross Web site. Further, such unsolicited e-mail may spread computer viruses. Do not respond to any e-mail soliciting donations from any organization. Instead, go directly to the organization's Web site or call to make donations.

- If you believe you have been solicited by a fraudulent charity, please file a complaint with the Secretary of State or the Attorney General via [www.checkthecharity.com](http://www.checkthecharity.com).
- If you feel uncomfortable simply, say no.