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Isaac M. O'Bannon • Nov. 02, 2012

As many on the East Coast are still having trouble finding basic essentials like clean water and fresh food, or at least modern expectations of phone and internet, most of the rest of the country is wanting to reach out and help. That's what Americans do.

With smart phones and online donation capabilities, helping relief agencies is easier than ever, but so is fraud. That's why the [Illinois CPA Society](#) has come out with some tips on how to be safe when making online donations to the Hurricane Sandy relief efforts, or any other charities.

- **When in doubt, don't.** Don't open unsolicited (SPAM) email, click on links in an unsolicited email, or respond to messages from sources you don't recognize seeking email donations. Only open attachments from known senders.
- **Make sure you're giving to a valid charity.**
- **Beware of groups using names similar to larger, respected organizations.** Use sites such as the American Institute of Philanthropy's www.charitywatch.org to make sure the charity is legitimate. Even though a group is listed when checking such sources, make your donation by going to the charity's website rather than through an e-mail message. Scammers are getting very good at replicating donation sites so that you really think you are donating to the real charity.
- **Ask questions.** How will your donation be used? What percentage of the contribution goes directly to Hurricane Sandy relief efforts? Is this an experienced organization? Get the charity's full name, website, address and phone number. Don't contribute to any charity that won't answer your questions or refuses to provide information.
- **Take steps to protect your identity.** Only provide credit card numbers on secure websites; be careful when sharing credit card numbers or any personal information over the phone.

- **Know who you're speaking with** and who may be listening to your call – or

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- **Verify your charitable contribution on your 2024 tax return and be certain** that the receiving organization is a qualified charity under IRS Code.
- **Check www.guidestar.org** for more information about charities recognized by the IRS.
- **When in doubt, check with a CPA** for guidance on charitable giving. If you need a CPA, the Illinois CPA Society site, www.icpas.org, has a “Find a CPA” directory that can help you locate a professional in your area.

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