



Partnership • Trust • Community

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## When A Scam Follows a Natural Disaster

### Summary

When natural disasters occur, fraudsters are often close behind. Their goal: exploit victims' financial and emotional vulnerability to steal money or personal information.

### Types of Schemes

Three different kinds of schemes are typical after a disaster: fraudulent disaster relief charities, post-disaster insurance offers, and repair work.

Charity scams appeal to people's kindness with solicitations – conducted by phone, text, or email – purporting to help victims of a natural disaster.

Post-disaster insurance scams target those victims directly with offers of help – such as "government-provided" temporary housing – for a fee or security deposit on the space.

### Red Flags

Consumers should know that representatives of the government (FEMA) do not solicit donations through emails, texts, or phone calls. Government disaster agencies will never call or text to ask for your financial information, and charge no fee to apply for assistance.

Additionally, though time is of the essence after a disaster, scammers manipulate victims by instilling a sense of urgency. Be aware of that technique and remember that your money is better spent if you take the time to verify the recipient's honesty.

### Disaster-Related Fraud Schemes

"In 2024, the FBI Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) received more than 4,500 complaints representing approximately \$96 million in losses from fraudulent charities and disaster relief campaigns."

## Resources – Education and Reporting

The federal government, states, commonwealths, territories, and the District of Columbia all have laws designed to protect older adults from elder abuse and guide the practice of adult protective services agencies, law enforcement agencies, and others. These laws vary considerably from state to state.

If you believe a vulnerable adult is being abused, the following organizations can help:

- National Adult Protection Services Association state resource finder
- Abuse in Disability Communities National Domestic Violence Hotline
- Consumer Financial Protection Bureau resources

Please remember to notify the vulnerable adult's financial institution so it can protect their assets and investigate the matter.

### Prevention Tips

- **Donate to charities you know and trust** with a proven track record of dealing with disasters. And watch out for name impersonation scams, in which fraudsters use names and logos similar to those of reputable charities. Look twice before you engage, even if the charity seems familiar.
- **Before you give, research the charity yourself** — especially if the donation request comes on social media. Check out the charity on the Better Business Bureau's Give.org, or Charity Watch. Find out exactly how much of your donation will go directly to the people the charity says it helps.
- **Don't donate to anyone who insists you must pay by cash, gift card, money wire, or cryptocurrency.** Legitimate organizations accept ordinary forms of payment. If you decide to donate, write a check directly to the charity, not an individual, or pay by credit card – it will give you more protection.
- **Be cautious about crowdfunding sites.** Know that money raised in a crowdfunding campaign goes to the campaign organizer, not directly to the people or cause it's set up to help. Review the crowdfunding platform's policies to be sure it verifies posts aren't scams. And remember, donations to crowdfunded sites aren't tax-deductible.
- **Confirm the number before you donate.** Phone scams often use spoofing techniques to make the information transmitted to your caller ID display appear official. If someone asks you to donate on the phone or via text, call the number on the charity's website to confirm the donation method.
- **Verify that your contractors are legitimate.** Contact your insurance company before hiring anyone, and make sure the company you hire is licensed and bonded.

### Resources

Learn more about how to donate safely with resources provided by the Federal Trade Commission at [ftc.gov/charity](https://ftc.gov/charity). For advice to help you prepare for, deal with, and recover from weather emergencies and the scams that follow, check out [ftc.gov/weatheremergencies](https://ftc.gov/weatheremergencies).

### If You're a Victim?

Immediately change any passwords you might have revealed. Consider reporting the attack to [IC3.gov](https://www.ic3.gov), law enforcement, and file a report with the [Federal Trade Commission](https://www.ftc.gov).

### Getting Help

If you have been the victim of a robbery or burglary or identify suspicious activity involving All One Credit Union, contact us immediately at 800-649-4646.

