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BBB Advises Donors on How to Vet Haiti Earthquake Charity Appeals:  
Not All Charities are Equipped to Help and Some Might be Fraudulent, Warns  
BBB

January 15, 2009, Memphis, TN: As immediate relief needs are assessed in the wake of the devastating earthquake in Haiti on January 12th, many Americans are looking for ways to help by donating to a charity. The Better Business Bureau warns that-as occurred following the tsunami in 2004 and Katrina in 2005- fraudulent charities will likely emerge to try and scam donations from well-meaning Americans.

Whenever there is a major natural disaster, be it home or abroad, there are two things that emerge: the generosity of Americans to donate time and money to help victims and the appearance of poorly run and in some cases fraudulent charities. Not only should you be concerned about avoiding fraud, you also need to make sure your money goes to competent relief organizations that are equipped and experienced to handle the unique challenges of providing assistance.

**The BBB offers the following seven tips to help Americans decide where to direct donations:**

Rely on expert opinion when it comes to evaluating a charity.  
Be cautious when relying on third-party recommendations such as bloggers or other Web sites, as they might not have fully researched the listed relief organizations. The public can go to [www.bbb.org/charity](http://www.bbb.org/charity) to research charities and relief organizations to verify that they are accredited by the BBB and meet the 20 Standards for Charity Accountability. A list of national charities working to provide assistance in Haiti that meet the BBB Wise Giving Alliance's Standards for Charitable Accountability is available in the News Center on our website at [www.memphis.bbb.org](http://www.memphis.bbb.org).

Be wary of claims that 100 percent of donations will assist relief victims. Despite what an organization might claim, charities have fund raising and administrative costs. Even a credit card donation will involve, at a minimum, a processing fee. If a charity claims 100 percent of collected funds will be assisting earthquake victims, the truth is that the organization is still probably incurring fund raising and administrative expenses. They may use some of their other funds to pay this, but the expenses will still be incurred.

Be cautious when giving online.

Be cautious about online giving, especially in response to spam messages and emails that claim to link to a relief organization. In response to the tsunami disaster in 2004, there were concerns raised about many Web sites and new organizations that were created overnight allegedly to help victims.

Donating via text messaging is becoming a popular way for people to get involved. For specific tips on text messaging your donation, visit the News Center on our website at [www.memphis.bbb.org](http://www.memphis.bbb.org).

Find out if the charity has an on-the-ground presence in the impacted areas. Unless the charity already has staff in the effected areas, it may be difficult to get new aid workers to quickly provide assistance. See if the charity's website clearly describes what they can do to address immediate needs.

Find out if the charity is providing direct aid or raising money for other groups. Some charities may be raising money to pass along to relief organizations. If so, you may want to consider "avoiding the middleman" and giving directly to charities that have a presence in the region. Or, at a minimum, check out the ultimate recipients of these donations to ensure the organizations are equipped to effectively provide aid.

Gifts of clothing, food or other in-kind donations.

In-kind drives for food and clothing-while well intentioned- may not necessarily be the quickest way to help those in need - unless the organization has the staff and infrastructure to be able to properly distribute such aid. Ask the charity about their transportation and distribution plans. Be wary of those who are not experienced in disaster relief assistance.

BBB ALERT warns you about scams that may cost your business or employees money. As soon as we learn about a scam, you'll know about it. We may also send you other important information regarding your BBB Accreditation. We will not share your email address with third parties.

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