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Attorney General Steve Marshall Encourages Generosity, Urges Vigilance When Donating to Groups to Aid Storm Victims

AG with Gov. Ivey, Local Officials in Beauregard Today to Survey Storm Damage

(MONTGOMERY) – In the wake of horrific tornadoes that took nearly two dozen lives in eastern Alabama this week, many Alabamians are struggling to recover, while others are looking for ways to help those who lost everything. Attorney General Steve Marshall joined Governor Kay Ivey and local officials in Beauregard today to survey storm damage.

Attorney General Marshall urged the public to exercise caution before giving money to charities, to ensure that their money really goes to help tornado victims. He also reminded the public that Alabama’s price-gouging laws are in effect due to the State of Emergency declared by Governor Kay Ivey.

“Alabamians are blessed with an indomitable spirit of compassion to help others,” said Attorney General Marshall. “Therefore, it’s not surprising that many want to contribute to their neighbors’ recovery from the recent devastating tornadoes. Sadly, criminals often seek to profit from others’ tragedies, therefore we must be vigilant in our charitable giving. Before contributing, please take steps to verify that your money will go to help storm victims and not to fund fraudsters. Know and use the resources available to check the legitimacy of charitable organizations so that your donations really do go to help those in need. And if you do suspect someone is trying to illegally solicit contributions, notify law enforcement or my office.”

Resources for Consumers

Consumers may find tips for careful and wise giving at www.ftc.gov/charity. Attorney General Marshall recommends that consumers take the following precautions:

Do your research

- Search the [Alabama charities database](#) on the Attorney General’s website.
- Search the charity’s name online with words like “complaint” and “scam.”
- Check out the charity’s ratings with groups like the [BBB Wise Giving Alliance](#), [Charity Navigator](#), and [Charity Watch](#).

Ask questions

- What are the charity’s website, address, and mission?
- How much of your donation will go directly to services, rather than fundraising?
- If you wish your donation to be used for Alabama’s tornado victims, ask if the money will be spent for this in particular and not for the charity’s overall purposes.



Be careful how you pay

- If someone asks you to send them cash, wire money, donate by gift card, or leave money under your front doormat for pickup, don't do it! That's how scammers often ask you to pay. It's safer to pay by credit card or check.
- If you're donating online, check that the webpage where you enter your payment information has "https" in the web address. That means your information is transmitted securely.
- Legitimate charities will give you a receipt with the amount of your donation. Keep that record and check your credit card and bank statements to make sure you're only charged for the donation you wanted to make.

Watch out for scammers' tricks

- Scammers spoof caller ID to make their fundraising calls look like they are from your local area code, or from an organization you know.
- Scammers pressure you into donating immediately before you have time to do research. Reputable charities do not use coercive tactics and welcome your donation at any time.
- Scammers will thank you for a donation you don't remember making. Scammers do that to trick you into thinking you actually made a pledge and to guilt you into sending money.

Donation Requests Through Social Media and Crowdfunding Sites

While many requests for donations through social media and crowdfunding sites are legitimate, some are scams. For example, there are people who misuse real pictures and stories to get you to donate, but the money goes into their own pockets. Crowdfunding sites often have little control over who uses them and how donations are spent. Research before you give.

Don't assume that solicitations on social media or crowdfunding sites are legitimate – even when they are shared or liked by your friends. Do your own research. And call or contact your friends offline to ask them about the post they shared.

State of Emergency/Price-Gouging Laws

The Governor's recent declaration of a State of Emergency activated Alabama's price-gouging laws. As people recover and rebuild from storms, they should be wary of those who would prey upon them through crimes such as price gouging and home-repair fraud. Although what constitutes an unconscionable price is not specifically set forth in state law, a price that is 25 percent or more above the average price charged in the same area within the last 30 days – unless the increase can be attributed to a reasonable cost – is a prima facie case of unconscionable pricing. The penalty is a fine of up to \$1,000 per violation, and those found to have willfully and continuously violated this law may be prohibited from doing business in Alabama.

Consumers and officials can report concerns of alleged fraud or illegal price gouging to the Attorney General's Consumer Interest Division by calling 1-800-392-5658, by writing to 501 Washington Avenue, Montgomery, Alabama 36130, or by visiting <https://ago.alabama.gov/ConsumerComplaint>.