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MEDIA ALERT

Want to help Orlando victims? Consumer Protection offers tips on donating wisely and how to avoid scams seeking to profit off Pulse shooting tragedy

"Utah Division of Consumer Protection has learned a fake Twitter account hijacked the Orlando club name trying to steal Bitcoin donations through bottled water appeals hours after tragedy"
(For immediate release...)

SALT LAKE CITY, Utah - Francine A. Giani, Executive Director of the Utah Department of Commerce, announced today that the Utah Division of Consumer Protection is asking the public to be on the lookout for possible Orlando nightclub shooting-related scams seeking to take advantage of our community's trusting nature following the Pulse nightclub tragedy. While some legitimate entities have come forward offering financial assistance to the victims and their families, con artists historically have looked for opportunities to steal donations from good Samaritans in the wake of tragedies.

"The horrific acts in Orlando have left many citizens wanting to help the victims and their families. Please know there are many legitimate charities and groups that are ready to help but they can't make a difference if your money goes to fraudsters," cautioned Francine A. Giani, "It just takes five minutes to make sure that a charity is registered with the Division of Consumer Protection."

According to news story on ARS Technica, hours after the massive shooting in Orlando, Florida a Twitter account using the Pulse nightclub name asked for financial donations to send bottled water and Oreo cookies to victims. The con artist created a convincing account by using real Twitter "hashtags" associated with the news stories along with hundreds of fake followers to grab the public's attention. The fake Pulse Twitter account then directed followers to donate through a shortened Web address which had a phony business registration in California and was linked to an anonymous email address through Hushmail. While the account was shut down later on June 12 and only took in \$30.00 in Bitcoin currency as stated by ARS Technica, regulators caution that others may try new schemes in coming weeks.

"As tragic news hits the internet, fraudsters may look for an opportunity to capitalize," said Daniel O' Bannon, Division Director, "Consumers need to be ever vigilant and do your homework before you click to donate to anyone or any group."

While crowdfunding accounts have gained wide appeal on social media for donations following tragic events, the Division of Consumer Protection warns it can be challenging to know which are legitimate and which accounts will send money straight to scam artists. Consumers should know that crowdfunding accounts should be met with “donate at your own risk.” The following tips can help offer the public assurances that their donation dollars will be used for a registered charitable cause.

How to Avoid Charity Scams after a Tragedy

- Be wary of social media pitches using hashtags # that sound convincing or similar to legitimate charities. Don’t respond to texts or emails that try to direct you to donation links without contacting the home organization first.
- Don’t fall for high pressure, give-on-the-spot appeals. You can always give after you do your homework.
- Donate to charities with a track record and a history. Charities that spring up overnight may disappear just as quickly - especially on the internet, via social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, or through email solicitations.
- Watch out for similar sounding names. Some phony charities use names that closely resemble those of respected, legitimate organizations. If you notice a small difference from the name of the charity you intend to deal with, call the organization you know to check it out. Check out an organization before donating. Some phony charities use names, seals, and logos that look or sound like those of respected, legitimate organizations.
- Do not send or give cash donations. For security and tax record purposes, it is best to pay by check made payable to the charity.
- Be wary of charities offering to send a courier or delivery service to collect your donation. This should be a “red flag” as legitimate charities don’t use these services.
- Call the charity. Find out if the organization is aware of the solicitation and has authorized the use of its name. If not, you may be dealing with a scam artist.
- Get it in writing. Ask for a receipt showing the amount of your contribution.
- Don’t be swayed by prize offers. Be wary of promises of guaranteed sweepstakes winnings in exchange for a contribution. Never give a donation to be eligible to win a sweepstakes.

- Know the difference between “tax exempt” and “tax deductible.” Tax exempt means the organization doesn’t have to pay taxes. Tax deductible means you can deduct your contribution on your federal income tax return.
- Call the Utah Division of Consumer Protection at (801) 530-6601 to see whether the charity or fundraising organization is registered in Utah or log on to: www.consumerprotection.utah.gov

Additional Resources for Consumers

www.guidestar.org - Guidestar

www.bbb.us/charity - Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance

www.charitynavigator.org – Charity Navigator

www.charitywatch.org - American Institute of Philanthropy

FTC public education materials in English: <http://www.ftc.gov/charityfraud/>

FTC public education materials in Espanol: <http://www.ftc.gov/donaciones>

For more information or to file a consumer complaint contact the Utah Division of Consumer Protection at (801) 530-6601 or log on to; www.consumerprotection.utah.gov

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