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## State of Utah Department of Commerce

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### MEDIA ALERT

#### **Division of Consumer Protection warns Utahns to watch for mudslide charity scams in wake of massive Washington State tragedy in Snohomish County**

*"Officials warning Utah residents to be wary when asked for donations from unknown sources following Saturday's tragic mudslide in Washington State"*

(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 mudslide-related scams seeking to take advantage of our community's trusting nature following Washington State's weekend tragedy. While no confirmed reports of mudslide charity schemes have been reported to Utah investigators, the Division of Consumer Protection is reminding the public to be wary of appeals via social media or over telephone or cell phone that may look to profit off this natural disaster.

"While our neighbors in Washington deal with a tragic recovery effort after Saturday's mudslide, brazen fraudsters will be busy looking for ways to profit off Utah's generous reputation," warned Francine A. Giani, "If you really want to help these mudslide victims, make sure your donations go to a charity registered with the State of Utah."

#### **Tips for Consumers: How to Avoid Charity Scams**

- **Donate to charities with a track record and a history.** Charities that spring up overnight may disappear just as quickly especially on the internet or via social media such as Facebook, Twitter, 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.
- **Don't fall for high pressure appeals.** Legitimate fundraisers generally don't push you to give on the spot.
- **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. You never have to 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.
- **Check with State regulators.** Call the Utah Division of Consumer Protection at (801) 530-6601 to see whether the charity or fundraising organization has to be registered in Utah or log on to: [www.consumerprotection.utah.gov](http://www.consumerprotection.utah.gov)

**Additional Resources for Consumers**

[www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org) - Guidestar

[www.bbb.us/charity](http://www.bbb.us/charity) - Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance

[www.charitynavigator.org](http://www.charitynavigator.org) – Charity Navigator

[www.charitywatch.org](http://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](http://www.consumerprotection.utah.gov)

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