

GIVE WISELY

Investigate Before You Donate

Every year hundreds of millions of dollars are lost to deceptive individuals and organizations posing as legitimate charities who prey upon the giving nature of individuals and businesses. In Los Angeles alone, it is estimated as much as \$100 million is lost to unscrupulous solicitors annually.

Unfortunately, putting unscrupulous solicitors out of business is no simple task. Recent Supreme Court decisions uphold the right of individuals and organizations to solicit on behalf of “charitable causes” without having to meet minimum standards for percentages of fundraising costs versus benefit. Because it is difficult to discern between legitimate and unscrupulous solicitations, individuals and businesses open their hearts and wallets – without the needed information to make sound judgements about whether or not to give.

Giving Basics

- DO verify a *Los Angeles Police Commission Information Card* is displayed at the solicitation site or provided upon request.
- DO prepare a “giving plan” ahead of time, based on research, so you do not feel pressured to give to everyone who asks for a donation.
- DO NOT give cash; always make contributions by check to the organization.
- DO NOT give in to pressure to give on the spot. Don’t allow any caller to intimidate you or bully you into giving or buying something “right now”.
- DO NOT be fooled by names that look impressive or that closely resemble the name of a well-known organization.
- Watch out for statements such as “all proceeds will go to the charity.” This can mean that the money left after expenses will go to the charity.
- IF soliciting for a law enforcement or fire department, call that department directly to ensure that it is actually participating in the fundraiser. The Los Angeles Police and Fire Departments do not solicit donations using the telephone or door-to-door.
- DO contact the Charitable Services Section of the Los Angeles Police Commission at 213 978-1144, pccharity@lapd.lacity.org OR the California Attorney General’s web site at <http://www.caag.state.ca.us/charities> to verify the organization is legitimate if you have **ANY** doubt.

Steps to Protect Yourself

To protect yourself and your community, take these steps.

- Step One: Know How to Spot Problem Solicitations
- Step Two: Ask the Right Questions
- Step Three: Find Out About the Organization
- Step Four: Make Your Decision

Mail Appeals

Mail appeals should clearly identify the charity and describe its programs in clear and specific language. Beware of appeals that bring tears to your eyes but tell you nothing of the charity or what it is doing about the problem it describes so well.

What To Do About Unwanted Mail

Many individuals complain about the flood of direct mail they receive from the charitable organizations. Most are seeking advice on how to have their names removed from the mailing lists of charities sending the appeals.

The easiest solution to the problem of unwanted mail is to decide in advance which charities you want to support and discard appeals from other groups. Don't feel guilty about not supporting all of the groups writing to you; they do not expect a donation from every person they solicit.

If you would like information about other ways to handle unwanted mail, write to the Philanthropic Advisory Service of the Council of Better Business Bureaus at 4200 Wilson Blvd., Suite 800, Arlington, VA 22203.

Telephone, Door-to-Door, and Street Solicitations

When you are approached for a contribution of either your time or your money, ask questions, and don't give a donation until you are satisfied with the answers. Charities with nothing to hide will encourage your interest.

When you are asked to buy candy, magazines, or tickets to a show to benefit a charity, be sure to ask what the charity's share will be.

Call the Charitable Services Section of the Los Angeles Police Commission if a fundraiser uses tactics such as intimidation, threats, or repeated and harassing calls or visits.

Resources

- Los Angeles Police Commission, Charitable Services Section, (213) 978-1144 or toll free call 800-439-2909 and ask for 978-1144. www.lapdonline.org Charitable Services Section
- <http://www.give.org> Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance Website
- caag.state.ca.us/charities – California Attorney General Website