

Public Safety Fund-Raising Appeals: Make Your Donations Count

consumer**brief**

Every day, police and firefighters risk their lives to make your community safer. To show your support, you may consider making a donation when a fund-raiser calls from a fire or police service organization. Before you write the check, the Division of Consumer Affairs urges you to consider the following facts.

- Simply having the words “police” or “firefighter” in an organization’s name does not mean that police or firefighters are members of the group.
- Contributions are not always distributed locally or used for public safety purposes just because an organization claims it has local ties or works with local police or firefighters. Before you donate, ask the organization to provide you with written information describing the programs your donation will support, and what percentage of the funds it raises is spent on the fund-raising process. Before you send a donation, call your local police or fire department to verify the authenticity of the group soliciting and to ensure that they will benefit directly from your donation.
- Most solicitations for police or firefighter groups are made by paid professional fund-raisers. Remember, your local police and firefighters are busy and do not have the time to solicit contributions over the phone. If someone calls to ask for a donation and he or she claims to be a police officer, a firefighter or a civilian employee of one of these departments, ask for the person’s badge number and his or her supervisor’s name and official title. Verify the information provided with the appropriate department.
- Donations to some police or firefighter groups may not be tax deductible. Many kinds of organizations

are tax exempt, including fraternal organizations, labor unions, and trade associations, but **donations to them are not tax deductible.**

Do you want to know where your public safety contributions are going? Taking the following precautions can help ensure that donation dollars will benefit the people, organization or community you want to help.

■ Ask fund-raisers for identification.

New Jersey requires paid fund-raisers to:

1. Identify themselves as such.
2. Name their company.
3. Name the organization for which they are soliciting.

■ Ask how your contribution will be used.

Remember to ask what percentage of your contribution will go to the fire or police organization, department or program.



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Also, be sure to ask if your contribution will be used locally. Get written information. Remember, a large portion of the money sent to any charitable organization employing professional fund-raisers may go into the pockets of those who are doing the soliciting.

■ **Ask if your contribution is tax deductible.**

Make your check payable to the official name of the group or charity. Avoid cash gifts because cash can be lost or stolen.

■ **Call the organization or your local police or fire department to verify a fund-raiser's claim to be collecting on behalf of the organization or department.**

If the claim cannot be verified, report the solicitation to your local law enforcement officials and the Division of Consumer Affairs.

■ **Be wary if a fund-raiser suggests you'll receive special treatment for making a donation.**

For example, no legitimate fund-raiser would

guarantee that you won't be stopped for speeding if you have a police organization's decal in your car window. Don't feel intimidated about declining to give. A caller who uses intimidation tactics is likely to be a scam artist. Report the call to your local law enforcement officials.

Call the Division of Consumer Affairs' hotline at 973-504-6215 or visit the Web site at www.NJConsumerAffairs.gov/charity/chardir.htm, to check the registration of the soliciting organization and to find out how it spends its money.

To file a complaint against a charity or a charity fund-raiser operating in the state of New Jersey, please visit our web site at: www.NJConsumerAffairs.gov/ocp/charities.htm where you may select, complete and submit a Consumer Affairs complaint form online. Written or typed charity complaints can be mailed to:

Charities Registration Section
P.O. Box 45021
Newark, NJ 07101

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