

# FTC Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Office of Consumer and Business Education

## Public Safety Fund-Raising Appeals: Make Your Donations Count

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 Federal Trade Commission (FTC) urges you to consider these facts:

- Simply having the words “police” or “firefighter” in an organization’s name doesn’t mean police or firefighters are members of the group.
- Just because an organization claims it has local ties or works with local police or firefighters doesn’t mean contributions will be used locally or for public safety. The organization should be able to provide you with written information describing the programs your donation will support, and their fund-raising costs before you donate.
- Most solicitations for police and fire service organizations are made by paid professional fund-raisers.
- 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 may not be tax deductible.

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. Many states require paid fund-raisers to identify themselves as such and to name the organization for which they’re soliciting.
- **Ask** how your contribution will be used. Ask what percentage of your contribution will go to the fire or police organization, department, or program. Also ask if your contribution will be used locally. Get written information.
- **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.
- **Ask** if your contribution is tax-deductible. Make your check payable to the official name of the group or charity. Avoid cash gifts: Cash can be lost or stolen.
- **Be wary** if a fund-raiser suggests you’ll receive special treatment for donating. 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.

The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues, visit [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov) or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261. The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure, online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.

For more information about fraud-related fundraising, visit the FTC web site at [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov) or the National Charities Information Bureau at [www.give.org](http://www.give.org).



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