



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Maine’s Department of Professional and Financial Regulation Advises Check on Unknown Charities, Especially Following Tragedies

*Phony Charities Reported After Hurricane Sandy and School Shooting in Newtown, Connecticut;
State Officials Anticipate Possibility of Similar Scams Following Oklahoma Tornado*

GARDINER – Citing reports of bogus charities springing up in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy and the school shooting in Connecticut, Governor Paul R. LePage and Commissioner Anne Head from the Department of Professional and Financial Regulation are encouraging Maine residents to check the legitimacy of unknown charities, particularly those that seem to quickly appear following a tragedy---such as this week’s devastating tornado in Oklahoma.

State officials urge potential donors to always research charitable organizations before making a donation. A quick check with the Department will provide essential information, such as whether the charity is authorized to raise money in Maine and whether the organization has been the subject of disciplinary action.

“Maine people have a well-deserved reputation for helping their neighbors and supporting charitable organizations,” Governor LePage said. “We’ve seen that spirit of giving most recently in Lewiston after three apartment fires displaced almost 200 residents. We encourage contributions to reputable organizations, but we must warn Mainers that criminals often use disasters to exploit the public’s generosity.”

Under Maine law, charitable entities and those who solicit money for charities, are required to become licensed with the Department’s Office of Professional and Occupational Regulation before soliciting contributions. The agency collects information about charitable activity in Maine and makes it available to the public. The Office also receives, and acts upon, complaints related to charitable solicitation.

“Charitable solicitation scams aren’t new, but attempts to take advantage of people’s generosity in the aftermath of tragedies are particularly reprehensible,” Commissioner Head said. “Because the victims of scams might never know they’ve been taken advantage of, or may be reluctant to report their loss of money, it’s important for government agencies to be proactive and alert the public about the potential for fraud.”

Commissioner Head advises individuals to ask questions and seek printed information about unknown charities; to confirm their legitimacy with regulators; to never send cash or wire money when requested to do so; to always keep receipts of donations; and to report concerns or complaints about questionable solicitations with the Department and law enforcement.

Information about charities can be obtained through the Department’s website (www.maine.gov/pfr), specifically at www.maine.gov/pfr/professionallicensing/professions/charitable. Links allow for the search of licensed charitable organizations, as well as disciplinary actions. Questions and complaints can also be made by calling the Charitable Solicitations Program at 207-624-8525.

Additionally, the website includes a News Alert with further guidance for avoiding scams. Information and other resources are also available from the Federal Trade Commission (www.ftc.gov/charityfraud/).

The Department of Professional and Financial Regulation protects the citizens of Maine and supports the economy through the oversight of State-chartered financial institutions, the insurance industry, grantors of consumer credit, the securities industry, and numerous professions providing services to the public.