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NEWS RELEASE



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Consumer Protection Alert

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: September 1, 2005

Hurricane Katrina Disaster Relief:
Beware of Fraudulent Solicitations for Aid

(Anchorage) – Attorney General David W. Márquez issued a warning today for people to exercise caution and common sense when responding to requests for disaster relief aid for the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

“Alaskans have been quick to come forward with offers to help the victims of this terrible tragedy,” said Márquez. “Many honest charities are already hard at work to offer relief. Unfortunately, scam artists and other opportunists will also seek to use this disaster to take advantage of peoples’ generosity.”

If you plan to contribute to the ongoing relief efforts, Attorney General David W. Márquez strongly advises that you donate through organizations that you are familiar with and which have a track record of assisting in disaster relief. Also, you may want to specify the purpose of your donation so that you will be assured that it will be used to help out the victims of Katrina.

If you are solicited by an organization or individual, be very cautious. Be sure you know the exact name of the organization, the name of the person asking for a donation, where the organization is located and how and where the donation will be used. If the organization is using a paid solicitor, ask how much of the donation will go to the charity. In Alaska, most charitable organizations and paid solicitors must be registered with the Department of Law, and members of the public can have access to registration materials in order to find out more about a particular charity.

Keep in mind the following tips to make sure that you are dealing with a reputable organization:

- Never send cash. Pay by a check made out to the charitable organization
- Reputable charities are happy to talk about their programs and efforts. Be on guard if they do not want to answer your questions
- Don’t respond to unsolicited emails. There are already reports that emails are used to direct people to illegitimate sites that look like reputable charities
- Never give out financial information, such as bank account numbers. Do not share social security numbers

“Temper your desire to help with the knowledge that any donation you make will be used for legitimate purposes,” said Márquez. “If you are uncertain about any request for assistance that you receive, do not be afraid to say, ‘No thank you.’” If you have concerns about a solicitation, contact the organization directly to check it out, before making a donation.

If you have additional questions or if you want to report on any suspicious solicitations, please contact the Department of Law, Consumer Protection Unit at: (907) 269-5200, or toll free at: 1-888-576-2529.

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