



GARY R. HERBERT
Governor

GREG BELL
Lieutenant Governor

State of Utah Department of Commerce

FRANCINE A. GIANI
Executive Director

THOMAS A. BRADY
Deputy Director

DANIEL O'BANNON
Director, Division of Consumer Protection

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MEDIA ALERT

Division of Consumer Protection asks wildfire victims to watch out for scams

"Utah's wildfires may provide opportunity for scam artists warns State regulators"

(For immediate release...)

SALT LAKE CITY, Utah - Francine A. Giani, Executive Director of the Utah Department of Commerce, announced today that the Utah Division of Consumer Protection is asking the public to be on the lookout for possible wildfire-related scams that may look to take advantage of Utah citizens' trusting nature. While no reports of fire-related charity scams have reached the Division of Consumer Protection to date, regulators are reminding the public to be wary of door-to-door solicitations for donations from groups you aren't familiar with, contractors offering cut-rate repair services or those who try to pressure you into a contract without getting the terms in writing.

"Sadly, Utah's wildfires have left many property owners in a very vulnerable situation. Even though you may be in a hurry to make home repairs, don't let others take advantage the second time around," cautioned Francine A. Giani, "It just takes five minutes to make sure your contractor is licensed or to check that your donation is going to a charity registered with the State."

Tips to avoid wildfire-related Scams

Door-to-Door Service Offers

- Make sure any contractor offering fire repair services is licensed with the Division of Occupational and Professional Licensing (DOPL) at the following website; www.dopl.utah.gov or by calling (801) 530-6626.
- Consumers may also check to see if the individual or company has faced prior disciplinary action at www.dopl.utah.gov
- Get any contract terms in writing. Don't fall for high pressure sales tactics when someone shows up at your door promising cheap materials and labor.

Solicitations for donations to groups or charities

- Donate to charities with a track record and a history. Charities that spring up overnight may disappear just as quickly especially on the internet.
- Check out an organization before donating. Some phony charities use names, seals and logos that look or sound like those of respected, legitimate organizations.
- Do not send or give cash donations. For security and tax record purposes, it is best to pay by check made payable to the charity.
- Ask for a receipt showing the amount of your contribution.
- Be wary of promises of guaranteed sweepstakes winnings in exchange for a contribution. You never have to give a donation to be eligible to win a sweepstakes.
- Call the Utah Division of Consumer Protection at (801) 530-6601 to see whether the charity or fundraising organization has to be registered in Utah or log on to: www.consumerprotection.utah.gov

Additional Resources for Consumers

www.guidestar.org - Guidestar

www.bbb.us/charity - Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance

www.charitynavigator.org – Charity Navigator

www.charitywatch.org - American Institute of Philanthropy

FTC public education materials in English: <http://www.ftc.gov/charityfraud/>

FTC public education materials in Espanol: <http://www.ftc.gov/donaciones>

For more information or to file a consumer complaint contact the Utah Division of Consumer Protection at (801) 530-6601 or log on to; www.consumerprotection.utah.gov

For media enquiries contact:

Jennifer Bolton

Public Information Officer

Utah Department of Commerce

(801) 530-6646 office

(801) 652-8322 cell

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