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### **National Center for Disaster Fraud to Coordinate Haitian and Chilean Fraud Complaints**

Shortly after the earthquake in Haiti last January, the FBI and the National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) established a telephone hotline to report suspected fraud associated with relief efforts. That number, (866) 720-5721, was initially staffed for the purpose of reporting suspected scams being perpetrated by criminals in the aftermath of the Haitian earthquake. Since then with the recent earthquake in Chile our efforts have expanded to identify similar fraud activity coming out of that disaster. Therefore the public is encouraged to call this same number (866) 720-5721 to report suspected fraud from either disaster. The telephone line is staffed by a live operator 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Additionally, e-mail information can be directly sent to [disaster@leo.gov](mailto:disaster@leo.gov).

The *National Center for Disaster Fraud* was originally established by the Department of Justice to investigate, prosecute, and deter fraud in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, when billions of dollars in federal disaster relief poured into the Gulf Coast Region. Now, its mission has expanded to include suspected fraud from any natural or manmade disaster. More than 20 federal agencies, including the FBI, participate in the NCDF, allowing the center to act as a centralized clearinghouse of information related to Haitian or Chilean Relief Fraud.

The FBI continues to remind the public to apply a critical eye and do their due diligence before giving contributions to anyone soliciting donations on behalf of Haitian or Chilean victims. Solicitations can originate from e-mails, websites, door-to-door collections, mailings and telephone calls, and similar methods.

Therefore, before making a donation of any kind, consumers should adhere to certain guidelines, including the following:

- Do not respond to unsolicited (spam) incoming e-mails, including clicking links contained within those messages because they may contain computer viruses.
- Be skeptical of individuals representing themselves as surviving victims or officials asking for donations via e-mail or social networking sites.
- Beware of organizations with copy-cat names similar to but not exactly the same as those of reputable charities.
- Rather than following a purported link to a website, verify the legitimacy of non-profit organizations by utilizing various Internet-based resources that may assist in confirming the group's existence and its non-profit status.

- Be cautious of e-mails that claim to show pictures of the disaster areas in attached files because the files may contain viruses. Only open attachments from known senders.
- To ensure contributions are received and used for intended purposes, make contributions directly to known organizations rather than relying on others to make the donation on your behalf.
- Do not be pressured into making contributions, as reputable charities do not use such tactics.
- Do not give your personal or financial information to anyone who solicits contributions. Providing such information may compromise your identity and make you vulnerable to identity theft.
- Avoid cash donations if possible. Pay by debit or credit card, or write a check directly to the charity. Do not make checks payable to individuals.
- Legitimate charities do not normally solicit donations via money transfer services.
- Most legitimate charities websites end in .org rather than .com.
- There are scams targeting Haitian immigrants and their families offering assistance in getting family members and friends out of Haiti. These individuals charge a fee and then claim they will provide the necessary immigration paperwork or an airline ticket for disaster victims to leave Haiti. For official information pertaining to immigration from Haiti to the U.S., visit the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) website at [www.USCIS.gov](http://www.USCIS.gov).

If you believe you have been a victim of fraud from someone or an organization soliciting relief on behalf of Haitian or Chilean earthquake victims, contact the National Center for Disaster Fraud at (866) 720-5721. You can also fax information to (225) 334-4707 or e-mail it to [disaster@leo.gov](mailto:disaster@leo.gov).

You can also report suspicious e-mail solicitations or fraudulent websites to the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center at [www.ic3.gov](http://www.ic3.gov).