

THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE DONATING YOUR TIME AND MONEY TO A CHARITY

- Get as many facts as you can, including the charity's exact name, address and telephone number. Request to see the solicitor's identification. Many California cities and counties have passed ordinances that try to protect the public against fraudulent solicitation. These ordinances may require charities and charitable fundraisers to register, certify their tax-exempt status, obtain a license to solicit and file an accounting of fundraising proceeds. Find out from your city if such ordinances are in effect.
- If you are solicited by telephone, ask to be mailed information about the charity's purpose, goals and finances before making any donation.
- Don't be fooled by names that sound impressive or that closely resemble the name of a familiar organization.
- Know the difference between "tax-exempt" and "tax-deductible" donations. Tax-exempt means the organization doesn't have to pay taxes. Tax-deductible means that you can deduct your contribution on your federal income tax return. Even if an organization is tax-exempt, your contribution may not be tax-deductible. If a tax deduction is important to you, ask for a receipt showing the amount of your contribution and stating that the donation is tax deductible.
- Don't give cash. Make checks out to the charitable organization, not the person asking for the donation. Never give your credit card number to a solicitor.
- Ask how your money will be used. Ask how much money will actually reach the charity and whether the solicitor is being paid to make the call. Ask whether the solicitor represents a professional fundraiser and whether the fundraiser is registered. Registration is not proof that the fundraiser is trustworthy, but failure to register violates California law.
- Don't be pressured to donate on the spot. Legitimate organizations will not rush or press you into giving money immediately.
- Be wary of a solicitation that includes an offer to send a courier to your house to immediately pick up your donation.
- Be skeptical if someone thanks you for a pledge you don't remember making. If you have any doubts about whether you've made a pledge or previously contributed, check your records. Be on the alert for invoices claiming you've made a pledge.
- You are under no obligation to pay for or return unordered merchandise, such as return address stickers, greeting cards or pens enclosed with an appeal letter.
- Be skeptical of promises or suggestions that your donation will give you special treatment from law enforcement. Be aware that having the word "police" or "firefighter" in an organization's name doesn't mean the organization is composed of public safety officers in your community or that donations will benefit your community. Most public safety organizations are not public charities. They are often social groups or unions and your donations are not tax-deductible. You may want to donate to such groups, but be aware that refusal to donate to such groups will not affect your access to police, fire, or emergency protection.
- Hang up the telephone on aggressive and harassing solicitors.