



CONSUMER ADVISORY

For Immediate Release

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ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE AND DEPARTMENT OF TECHNOLOGY AND INFORMATION WARN OF INTERNET KATRINA RELIEF SCAMS

Dover - The Department of Technology and Information (DTI) in conjunction with Delaware's Attorney General's Office issues a warning to all Delawareans regarding computer scams, spam and fraud related to the Hurricane Katrina disaster.

"It is tragic and appalling that unscrupulous people are using the worst national disaster the United States has experienced in recent memory, for purposes of criminal fraud," said Delaware's CIO, Thomas Jarrett. "We want to warn Delawareans not to fall prey to fraudulent websites masquerading as charitable organizations or phony emails pretending to solicit money for well-known reputable charities."

In less than two days after the hurricane, Internet fraudsters were already beginning to flood the Internet with websites promising to forward money to relief agencies and workers. Websites have emerged with names such as Katrinahelp.com and Katrinarelief.com contain vague messages regarding their search for relief agencies to use their website and urging others to share "their good fortune with Katrina's victims" through the site.

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Attorney General M. Jane Brady said, "These tragedies bring out the best in many of us, but also bring out scam artists who take advantage of our generosity for others in need. It is reprehensible."

Brady advises Delawareans to beware of Katrina Disaster solicitations that may not be from legitimate charities. Con artists may use sound-alike names, resembling well-known charities, or look-alike websites or e-mails masquerading as legitimate charities. If citizens have concerns about a solicitation, she urged them to call the Consumer Protection Unit in her office.

It is not just solicitations that consumers should be concerned about. Computer security experts also caution computer users to be wary of emails claiming to contain attached photos of the Katrina disaster areas. Clicking on these attached files could launch computer viruses or worms.

The Attorney General's Consumer Protection Unit recommends that citizens never give out personal financial information in response to a telephone solicitation or e-mail. Contact the charity yourself or physically type in a charity's website instead of clicking on a link. Avoid cash donations and make checks payable to the organization, not an individual. Lastly, if donating by credit card, never type your credit card or bank account number into an e-mail.

DTI suggests that citizens carefully research any hurricane relief donation sites in order to avoid these Internet scams. One source for independent verification of charities is GuideStar.org. (<http://GuideStar.org>) GuideStar includes listings of those charitable groups that have registered with and met the guidelines of the U.S. Internal Revenue Service's terms for a nonprofit charity. Another site sponsored by the Better Business Bureau, www.give.org monitors charities. DTI further advises Delawareans never to reply to any unsolicited or unfamiliar email address.

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