



REBUILDING AND RECOVERING AFTER TRAGEDIES

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

APRIL BROUGHT A TERRIBLE TRAGEDY TO the rural community in West, Texas. In the wake of a deadly explosion that literally shook the town and reportedly claimed the lives of 10 first responders and four local residents, the good folks of West have embarked on the road to recovery and rebuilding.

The day after the explosion, I had the opportunity to see the response to the situation in West personally. Before I got there, I knew the damage was going to be devastating, but there was nothing that could have prepared me for the destruction close to ground zero of the blast.

But amid all of the damage, I also saw hope. I saw first responders who were helping begin the healing process for the people of West. And I saw the community coming together to provide

food, shelter – and, most importantly, support for one another. Since then, the outpouring of donations has overwhelmed the tiny town.

As generous Texans reach out to help their neighbors in the wake of these devastating events, they should carefully vet relief organizations and websites before making any charitable contributions. Sadly, cybersquatters – unscrupulous individuals who register online domain names with the intention of using them in bad faith – often move quickly to exploit tragedies.

According to an industry news site about online domain names, more than 150 websites with domain names relating to the West Fertilizer explosion have been registered. While a few of these domain names possibly will be used for genuine charitable or other

efforts, the majority of them are destined to be used as scam-related websites to fraudulently solicit charitable donations or maliciously provide links to malware-infected sites.

Texans who want to contribute to relief efforts to benefit survivors of the recent Moore, Oklahoma tornadoes or the West explosions should do so through well-known and easily recognized charities, such as the American Red Cross. Doorstep, telephone and online solicitation should be treated cautiously and fully researched.

What we are seeing in West is a Texas-sized response to tragedy. Our hearts and prayers continue to be with the victims, and our gratitude goes out to all the first responders whose bravery never ceases to inspire us. – June 2013

POINTS TO REMEMBER



CHARITABLE DONATION

Texans who are solicited for charitable contributions to relief efforts by telephone, text message, email, mail, social networking sites or otherwise should consider the following:

- Ensure the relief organization is legitimate. Ask for credentials, including the soliciting entity's exact name and telephone number, particularly if the purported relief organization is not well known.
- Call the charity directly and confirm that the solicitor is actually working for that organization.
- Watch for questionable charities using names that closely resemble the names of well-known charities.
- Find out how the donation will be used.
- Be wary of appeals that are long on emotion and short on descriptions about how charitable contributions will aid the recovery effort.
- Don't succumb to high-pressure tactics and demands for an immediate decision. A legitimate charity welcomes background checks on their operations.
- Never give a credit card or bank account number to an unknown solicitor.
- Never give cash and never agree to give money to a courier. Write a check to the charity directly – not the soliciting individual – and get a receipt.

To learn more about how to avoid common charity scams, contact the Texas Attorney General's Office at (800) 252-8011 or visit www.texasattorneygeneral.gov.



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