

Don't give to these 20 charities

With the gift-giving season upon us, Attorney General John Kroger is releasing a list of Oregon's 20 Worst Charities, offering tips to consumers on donating wisely and unveiling a landmark legislative proposal to combat unscrupulous non-profits.

"Many charities do great work, but some are little more than scams that do little to help the people they claim to support," Kroger said.

In addition to increasing consumer awareness, Kroger will ask the 2011 Legislature to pass a law making Oregon the first state in the country to use the tax code to fight charities that spend most of the money they raise on telemarketers and administration. The proposal would eliminate the Oregon tax deduction for donations to charities that spend less than 30 percent of the money they raise on the people they claim to support.

"This proposal will help kick sham charities out of Oregon," said Kroger. "If the rest of the country follows Oregon's lead, we could end the rampant abuse of non-profit laws."

State law requires charities to file periodic financial reports with the Oregon Department of Justice disclosing how much money the organization raised and how the funds were spent. The Department's Charitable Activities Section has identified 20 organizations that spent more than 75 percent of the donations they collected on administrative costs and professional fundraising.

While guidelines issued by the Better Business Bureau (BBB) suggest that charitable organizations should spend at least 65% of their funds on charitable programs, every charity on the Department of Justice's list devoted less than 25% of their expenditures on charitable program activities.

At the top of the list is Shiloh International Ministries, which claims to provide medical necessities and moral support to needy children and to provide assistance to the homeless. According to the most recent financial filings, the California-based non-profit spent an average of \$937,315 per year, 96.37% of which went to management and fundraising.

No. 2 on the list is Law Enforcement Education Program, which supposedly raises money to educate teenagers on the effects of alcohol. The Michigan-based non-profit spent just 6.26% of the annual average \$1,893,929 it raised on charitable purposes.

The Korean War Veterans National Museum and Library was one of many groups on the list that says it raises money to help veterans. The Illinois-based group spent 96.97% of the annual average \$2,265,809 it raised on telemarketing and administration.

Currently, more than 16,000 charities are registered with the Oregon Department of Justice, and many of them are actively seeking donations. Attorney General Kroger cannot dictate how charities spend your money, but he is providing Oregonians some basic advice to ensure your gifts go to a worthy cause.

Before donating, it is important to make sure the organization is registered with the state by searching the Department's online database at <http://www.doj.state.or.us> or by calling 971-673-1880. You can also visit www.guidestar.org, a national clearinghouse of information on charities and their performance.

Watch out for solicitations that thank you for your previous support, and charities that send invoices claiming you made a recent pledge when you didn't. These methods are intentionally confusing and dishonest ways to gain donations.

Consumers are advised not to supply personal information over the phone. Legitimate charities will accept contributions by check, which should always be made payable to the organization not the individual collecting the donation.

The Oregon Department of Justice Charitable Activities Section is responsible for ensuring that organizations soliciting funds in Oregon register and file periodic financial reports showing how donations are spent. The section also protects the public against organizations that attempt to mislead Oregon donors. The section this year took action against several charities that purported to benefit veterans.

Christmas TOP TEN LIST



In the spirit of the season, here are some suggestions that might make Christmas a little brighter for everyone.

1. Volunteer your time at a local charity, nursing home, hospice or senior center.
2. Invite someone who is alone to Christmas dinner.
3. Donate clothing, food or toys to a family in need.
4. Cook a meal for an elderly or homebound neighbor.
5. Craft homemade holiday decorations with your kids.
6. Replenish your spirit. Visit your local house of worship.
7. Create a family tradition and fond memories by starting a holiday scrapbook.
8. Call, write or plan a get-together with a friend you haven't seen in many years.
9. Spread holiday cheer. Smile and be kind to others.
10. Show appreciation to all the people who have made your life a little brighter.

*Wishing you a
Merry Christmas*

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