Public Service Announcement

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

28 November 2017

Questions regarding this PSA should be directed to your local FBI Field Office.

Local Field Office Location: www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field

FRAUDSTERS CAPITALIZE ON NATURAL DISASTERS

The FBI reminds the public there is the potential for fraud in the aftermath of the wildfires in Northern California. The FBI has received indications that fraudsters are using e-mail and social-networking sites, including job search engines, to facilitate fraudulent activities.

Disasters such as the wildfires in Northern California prompt fraudsters to solicit contributions purportedly for a charitable organization or a good cause. Fraudsters may also attempt to capitalize on the misfortune of victims by advertising false temporary housing ads which victims send money to the subject in order to have property keys mailed to them. Victims may also receive information regarding false job opportunities in which victims will receive a fraudulent check they are expected to deposit and then distribute to various accounts. Therefore, before making a donation of any kind or supplying payment for any type of service related to victim relief, consumers should adhere to certain guidelines, to include the following:

- Do not respond to unsolicited (spam) e-mails.
- Be skeptical of individuals representing themselves over e-mail as officials soliciting for donations.
- Do not click on links within an unsolicited e-mail.
- Be cautious of e-mails claiming to contain pictures in attached files, as the files may contain viruses. Only open attachments from known senders.
- To ensure contributions are received and used for the intended purposes, make contributions directly to known organizations rather than relying on others to make the donation on your behalf.
- Validate the legitimacy of the non-profit status of the organization by directly accessing the recognized charity or aid organization's website rather than following an alleged link to the site.
- Attempt to verify the legitimacy of the non-profit status of the organization by using various Internet-based resources, which may also assist in confirming the actual existence of the organization.
- Do not provide personal or financial information to anyone who solicits contributions; providing such information may compromise your identity and make you vulnerable to identity theft.
- Be cautious of e-mails claiming to offer employment for which you did not expressly apply.
- Thoroughly research housing ads prior to sending money to a potential landlord.

If you believe you have been a victim of disaster-related fraud, contact the National Center for Disaster Fraud[1] by telephone at (866) 720-5721, by fax at (255) 334-4707, or by e-mail at disaster@leo.gov.

[1]National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) was originally established by the Department of Justice to investigate, prosecute, and deter fraud in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Its mission has expanded to include suspected fraud from any natural or man-made disaster. More than 20 federal agencies, including the FBI, participate in the NCDF, allowing it to act as a centralized clearinghouse of information related to relief of fraud.