

The Virgin Islands Consortium

With hurricane Season Underway, IRS Warns Of Scams Related To Natural Disasters

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With hurricane season underway, the Internal Revenue Service is reminding taxpayers that criminals and scammers often try to take advantage of the generosity of taxpayers who want to help victims of major disasters.

Hurricane season runs June 1 to Nov. 30, and taxpayers need to be vigilant of scams that will undoubtedly pop up when and if a hurricane occurs during that time, the IRS said.

Fraudulent schemes normally start with unsolicited contact by telephone, social media, e-mail or in-person using a variety of tactics.

- Some impersonate charities to get money or private information from well-intentioned taxpayers.
- Bogus websites use names similar to legitimate charities to trick people to send money or provide personal financial information.
- They even claim to be working for or on behalf of the IRS to help victims file casualty loss claims and get tax refunds.
- Others operate bogus charities and solicit money or financial information by telephone or email.

Help for disaster victims

Disaster victims can call the IRS toll-free disaster assistance telephone number (866-562-5227). Phone assistants will answer questions about tax relief or disaster-related tax issues. Details on available relief can be found on the disaster relief page on IRS.gov.

Donate to real charities

To help taxpayers donate to legitimate charities, the IRS website, IRS.gov, has a search feature, Tax Exempt Organization Search, that helps users find or verify qualified charities. Donations to these charities may be tax-deductible.

- Contribute by check or credit card, never give or send cash, to have a record of the tax-deductible donation.
- Don't give out personal financial information — such as Social Security numbers or credit card and bank account numbers and passwords — to anyone who solicits a contribution.

Taxpayers suspecting fraud by email should visit IRS.gov and search for the keywords "Report Phishing." More information about tax scams and schemes may be found at IRS.gov using the keywords "scams and schemes."