



AI-Generated Fake Charities and Disaster-Relief Appeals

How to tell a real cause from an AI-made con — and give so your gift reaches real people.

————— **An Extended Guide · No. 1638 · SAFETY** —————

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

Bill Davis — Bill's Home Tech

(330) 200-8042 · bill@billshometech.com · Atwater, Ohio

Book a visit — billshometech.com/book

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

Fake charities spike after disasters and around the holidays, and AI now makes them more convincing with realistic images, videos, and heart-tugging stories. The safe way to give is to decide for yourself whom to support, check the charity through an independent source, and give to it directly through its official website — not through an appeal that found you by call, text, email, social media, or a crowdfunding link from a stranger. Never give by gift card, wire, or cryptocurrency, and never let urgency rush your generosity.

- 1 An emotional appeal asks you to donate now, often after a disaster.
- 2 Don't give through the call, text, email, or link that found you.
- 3 Decide for yourself whom you want to help.
- 4 Check the charity through an independent source (like a charity watchdog).
- 5 Give directly through the charity's official website; never by gift card, wire, or crypto.

WATCH OUT

A real charity gladly takes your gift tomorrow, after you've checked it out. Pressure to give 'right now,' or to pay by gift card or crypto, is the mark of a scam — not a real cause.

1. Why I Wrote This One

Scammers prey on our kindest instinct.

In more than thirty years of helping folks across Portage County, I have come to believe that the cruelest scams are the ones that turn our best qualities against us. Charity scams are near the top of that list. They take generosity — the simple, good wish to help someone in need — and weaponize it, so that a person's kindness ends up funding criminals instead of hurricane victims, sick children, or struggling neighbors. I am writing this guide so your generosity can do the good you intend, and not be stolen.

These scams have always existed, but artificial intelligence has made them more convincing than ever. A fake appeal can now come with realistic AI-generated photos of 'victims,' heart-wrenching AI-written stories, convincing fake videos, and polished fake charity websites, all produced in minutes. After a disaster especially, fake charities and appeals flood in, exploiting the rush of public sympathy and the urgency of a crisis. The emotional pull is real; the cause behind it often is not.

The good news is that you do not have to become hard-hearted or stop giving to stay safe — and I would never want you to. You simply need a safe way to give, one that makes sure your gift reaches a real, vetted charity. The key is to give on your own terms, to causes you choose and check, rather than reacting to appeals that find you. We will walk through how these scams work, especially after disasters, and exactly how to give so your kindness lands where you intend. No fear, and no loss of your generous heart.

TIP

The goal isn't to stop giving — it's to give safely, so your generosity reaches real people in need instead of criminals. You can keep your open heart and protect it at once.

2. How Fake Charity Scams Work

The common shapes they take.

Fake charity scams come in several forms, but they share a core: an emotional appeal, a sense of urgency, and a request for money through a channel the scammer controls. Knowing the common shapes helps you recognize the pattern no matter how the particular appeal is dressed. Each is designed to move you from feeling to giving quickly, before you pause to check.

- A completely fake charity invented by scammers, with a professional-looking name, website, and story.
- A fake charity that mimics a real, well-known one, using a name and logo almost identical to the genuine organization.
- A real-sounding appeal after a disaster, exploiting a hurricane, flood, fire, or tragedy in the news.
- A personal crowdfunding appeal — a 'sick child,' a 'family who lost everything' — that is entirely fabricated.
- A scammer posing as a charity by phone, text, email, or social media, pressuring you to give immediately.

Notice the thread: the appeal reaches out to you — by call, message, ad, social post, or crowdfunding link — and asks you to give right now, often by a method that is hard to trace. The emotional story, whether about disaster victims, a sick child, veterans, animals, or police and firefighters, is the hook. The urgency and the convenient payment are the trap. Whatever the cause invoked, that shape — an unsolicited emotional appeal pressing for an immediate, untraceable gift — is the warning sign.

WATCH OUT

Scammers often mimic the names and logos of real, trusted charities, changing a word or two. A familiar-sounding name is not proof — check the exact organization before giving.

3. What AI Adds to the Con

Why these are more convincing now.

Artificial intelligence has supercharged charity fraud by making the emotional content cheap, fast, and startlingly realistic. Where a scammer once had to find or steal images and write clumsy appeals, they can now generate exactly what they need on demand: photorealistic images of 'victims' who do not exist, moving videos of disasters or suffering, and fluent, heart-wrenching stories tailored to pull at your sympathy. The whole emotional apparatus of a fake cause can be conjured in minutes.

This matters because it removes the tells we once relied on. A fake appeal used to be catchable by its crude images or awkward writing; now the photos look real, the videos are convincing, and the story reads beautifully. AI can also create entire fake charity websites, complete with professional design, invented testimonials, and fabricated financial information, so that even a careful person checking the organization's own site finds it looks entirely legitimate. The surface polish is no longer any guide to authenticity.

The takeaway is the same as with other AI scams: you cannot judge a charity by how real and moving its appeal looks, because that is exactly what AI makes easy to fake. So your defense shifts away from judging the appeal's content and toward how you give — choosing the cause yourself, verifying the organization through independent sources, and donating directly through official channels. The AI can fake the appeal flawlessly; it cannot fake a listing in an independent charity watchdog or the official donation page of a genuine organization you reached yourself.

GOOD TO KNOW

AI can produce flawless fake victim photos, videos, stories, and even whole charity websites in minutes. So don't judge a cause by its appeal — verify the organization independently.

4. The One Rule for Giving Safely

Give on your terms, to causes you check.

Here is the whole defense in one sentence: you decide for yourself whom you want to help, verify that charity through an independent source, and give to it directly through its official channel — rather than reacting to any appeal that found you. That is it. You flip from being a target of appeals to being the one who chooses, checks, and gives on your own terms. The appeals that reach you become things to ignore, not things to act on.

This works because it does not depend on judging whether an appeal is genuine, which AI has made so hard. Scammers must reach out to you to run their con — the call, the social post, the crowdfunding link, the disaster appeal in your feed. When you refuse to give in response to any appeal that found you, and instead initiate your giving yourself to vetted charities, you cut off every one of those approaches at once. A real charity is always reachable and givable-to through its own official channels, so you lose no ability to do good.

In practice, when an appeal moves you, let it inspire the cause but not the transaction. If a disaster in the news stirs you to help, do not give through the appeal in front of you; instead, think of a reputable organization that does that kind of work, check it, and give directly through its genuine website. Your generosity still flows to the need that moved you — it just travels a safe road to get there, reaching real relief instead of a criminal's account.

WATCH OUT

Let an appeal inspire the cause, not the transaction. Moved by a disaster? Don't give through the appeal — pick a reputable charity, check it, and give through its own official site.

5. The Disaster Spike

Why crises bring a flood of fakes.

Fake charities surge dramatically after disasters — hurricanes, floods, wildfires, tornadoes, tragedies in the news — and it is worth understanding why, so you are ready rather than caught off guard. A disaster creates an enormous wave of public sympathy and an urgent desire to help, exactly the emotional conditions scammers exploit. They register fake charities, build appeals, and flood phones, inboxes, and social media within hours of a crisis, racing to capture generosity before scrutiny catches up.

The urgency of a disaster works in the scammer's favor. People feel the suffering is happening now and want to help now, which makes them more likely to give quickly to an appeal without the usual checking. Scammers lean into this, stressing that victims need help immediately, that every minute counts, that you must give right away. The genuine urgency of the disaster is used to manufacture a false urgency about your donation, hurrying you past verification.

So when a disaster strikes and you feel moved to help — which is a wonderful instinct — be especially deliberate about how you give. This is precisely when fake appeals are thickest and the pressure to give fast is highest. Take the extra moment to choose a reputable disaster-relief organization yourself, check it, and give directly. The real victims are helped just as well by a gift that takes you five minutes to route safely, and your generosity is protected from the criminals who crowd in after every tragedy.

WATCH OUT

Fake charities flood in within hours of a disaster, using the crisis's real urgency to rush your donation. After a disaster is exactly when to slow down and give deliberately to a vetted charity.

6. How to Check a Charity

The independent sources that tell you the truth.

Checking a charity before you give is easier than most people think, thanks to independent watchdogs whose whole job is to evaluate charities. Because scammers can make their own appeals and websites look perfect, you verify through these outside sources rather than through anything the charity itself presents. A few minutes here is what separates a safe gift from a stolen one.

- Independent charity evaluators — such as the BBB Wise Giving Alliance (Give.org), Charity Navigator, and CharityWatch — rate and report on charities' legitimacy and how they use donations.
- The IRS's tax-exempt organization search lets you confirm a charity is a registered, legitimate nonprofit.
- Your state's charity registration — in Ohio, the Attorney General's office oversees charity registration and can be checked.
- A search for the charity's name plus words like 'scam,' 'complaint,' or 'review,' which can surface warnings.

- The charity's own official website, reached by typing its address yourself — useful once you've confirmed it's real through the sources above.

The pattern is to confirm the organization exists, is a legitimate registered nonprofit, and has a sound reputation for using donations well, all through sources independent of the appeal. If a 'charity' cannot be found in these independent listings, or has warnings attached, that is your answer. And watch the exact name and web address carefully, since scammers mimic real charities with tiny changes — you want to verify and give to the genuine organization, not a near-identical impostor.

TIP

Check a charity through an independent watchdog like Give.org or Charity Navigator before giving. If a 'charity' can't be found there, that's your answer.

7. How the Money Should Move

Safe payment versus the scammer's favorites.

How you are asked to give is a powerful tell, because real charities and scammers prefer very different payment methods. Legitimate charities accept traceable, reversible, documented payments and give you a record for your taxes. Scammers want fast, untraceable, irreversible money. The payment method a 'charity' pushes can reveal the con before you even check the organization.

- Safe: a check to the charity, or a card payment made on the charity's own official website.
- A red flag: requests to pay by gift card — no real charity collects donations in gift cards.
- A red flag: wire transfers or money-transfer services to an individual or unfamiliar account.
- A red flag: cryptocurrency, which is fast and hard to trace — rarely how ordinary charitable giving works.
- A red flag: cash handed to a collector, a courier sent to pick up your donation, or payment to a person's personal account.

The gift-card, wire, and cryptocurrency demands are especially telling: no legitimate charity asks you to donate by buying gift cards and reading off the numbers, and ordinary charitable giving does not require wiring money to a person or feeding cash into a crypto machine. When an appeal steers you toward any of these, that alone is strong evidence of a scam, regardless of how moving the cause sounds. Giving by check or by card on the

charity's own verified website keeps your donation traceable, documented, and far safer.

WATCH OUT

No real charity collects donations by gift card, wire to a person, or cryptocurrency. Any of those requests, however worthy the cause sounds, is the mark of a scam.

8. The Crowdfunding Question

Personal appeals, real and fake.

Online crowdfunding — personal fundraising pages for a sick child, a family who lost their home, someone's medical bills — occupies a tricky middle ground, because many are heartfelt and genuine, while others are entirely fabricated. Unlike registered charities, personal crowdfunding appeals often have little verification behind them, so a moving story and a photo are not evidence that the situation is real or that the money will reach the person described. AI makes fabricating such appeals easier than ever.

So approach crowdfunding appeals, especially those shared by strangers or that find you through ads and social media, with extra care. A fabricated page can feature AI-generated photos and a wrenching story, and a scammer can set one up to exploit a real disaster or a trending tragedy. Even a genuine-seeming appeal shared widely may not be what it claims. The emotional pull of an individual's story is strong, which is exactly why these can be effective scams.

The safest approach is to give through crowdfunding mainly when you personally know the person or organizer, or can independently verify the situation is real — a cause from your own church, a neighbor you know, a page a trusted friend vouches for from direct knowledge. For strangers' appeals and viral causes, prefer giving to an established, vetted charity that does similar work. If you do give to a crowdfunding appeal, use the platform's official site and be aware that your gift may be less protected and less verifiable than a donation to a registered charity.

WATCH OUT

A moving crowdfunding story and photo prove nothing — both can be fabricated, now with AI. Give to personal appeals mainly when you know the person or can truly verify the situation.

9. The Phone, Text, and Email Appeals

Unsolicited pitches deserve caution.

A great many charity scams arrive as unsolicited phone calls, texts, and emails, often with professional scripts and emotional stories. A caller may claim to represent a well-known charity, a police or firefighters' fund, a veterans' organization, or a disaster-relief effort, and press you to pledge a donation on the spot. Because these invoke causes most people respect, and because refusing can feel uncharitable, they can be effective. But an unsolicited appeal is exactly where caution is most warranted.

Even when the caller claims to be from a real charity, you cannot verify that over the phone, and some scammers do impersonate genuine organizations. There are also for-profit fundraisers who call on behalf of real charities but pass along only a small fraction of what they collect, so even a 'real' phone solicitation may not be an efficient way to give. The simplest, safest response to any unsolicited charity call, text, or email is not to give in response to it at all.

Instead, thank the caller, decline to give on the spot, and — if the cause interests you — hang up and give the way this guide recommends: choose the charity, check it independently, and donate directly through its official website. You owe an unsolicited solicitor no immediate pledge and no explanation. A legitimate charity is perfectly happy to receive your gift through its own channels on your own timeline; only a scammer needs you to commit right now, on the call, before you can check.

WATCH OUT

Never pledge to an unsolicited charity call, text, or email. If the cause moves you, hang up, check the charity yourself, and give directly through its official site.

10. The Fake Website Trap

When the charity's 'own site' is a fake.

Because I keep urging you to give through a charity's official website, it is important to know that scammers build fake charity websites too, and AI makes them look professional and complete. A fake site can mimic a real charity's design, or present a wholly invented charity that looks entirely legitimate, with a donation page ready to capture your card details. If you reach such a site through a link in a scam appeal, or through an ad, 'giving through the website' can still lead you astray.

This is why how you reach the website matters as much as using one. Do not click links in appeals, ads, or messages to reach a charity's donation page; those can lead to fakes. Instead, once you have verified a charity through independent sources, navigate to its site yourself — type its known address, or follow the link from the independent watchdog's listing, which points to the genuine organization. Watch the web address carefully for tiny misspellings or odd endings that signal an impostor site.

The combination is what keeps you safe: verify the charity through an independent source, then reach its official site through a route you trust — your own typing or the watchdog's verified link — not through the appeal. That way, both the organization and the website you give through are confirmed genuine. Giving online is perfectly safe and convenient when done this way; the danger lies only in letting an appeal hand you the link, since that link may lead to a beautiful fake built to pocket your donation.

WATCH OUT

Scammers build convincing fake charity sites too. Reach a charity's donation page by typing its address or following a watchdog's verified link — never through a link in the appeal.

11. Why It Works on Good People

Generosity is the vulnerability.

It is worth naming plainly that charity scams work precisely because they target good, generous, compassionate people. The more readily you feel others' suffering and want to help, the more powerfully a fake appeal pulls at you. This is not a weakness to be ashamed of; it is one of the finest things about a person, and it is heartbreaking that criminals exploit it. If you have been fooled by a charity scam, or nearly so, it reflects your kindness, not any failing.

The scams also exploit the discomfort of saying no to a worthy-sounding cause. Many people feel it would be unkind or selfish to decline a charity appeal or to take time checking it, especially when a caller or a story frames the need as desperate and immediate. Scammers deliberately use that discomfort, making you feel that pausing to verify is itself heartless. In truth, verifying is not heartless at all; it ensures your kindness actually helps rather than being stolen.

So give yourself full permission to be a careful giver, and understand that caution and generosity are partners, not opposites. The most generous thing you can do is make sure your gifts reach real people in need, which means giving on your own terms to vetted causes rather than reacting to every appeal. A thoughtful giver does more good, not less, because their generosity is protected and directed where it truly helps. Your compassion is precious; checking simply makes sure it is not wasted on criminals.

GOOD TO KNOW

Charity scams target your kindness, not any weakness. Verifying isn't heartless — it's what makes sure your generosity reaches real people instead of thieves. Caution and compassion are partners.

12. A Giving Plan You Control

Decide your giving in calm moments.

One of the best protections against charity scams is to plan your giving in advance, in calm moments, rather than reacting to appeals in emotional ones. When you have decided ahead of time which causes and organizations you want to support, you are far less swayed by the flood of appeals, because you already know where your generosity is going. A giving plan turns you from a target of appeals into a deliberate giver on your own terms.

Your plan can be simple: pick a handful of causes you care about — your church, a local food bank, a disaster-relief organization, a medical charity, whatever moves you — verify them once through independent sources, and support them directly through their official channels on a schedule that suits you. When an appeal arrives, even a moving one, you can let it pass knowing you have already chosen thoughtful ways to give. If a new cause genuinely draws you, you add it to the plan the safe way, after checking, rather than giving on impulse.

This approach also helps with the emotional difficulty of declining appeals. Instead of feeling you must respond to each one, you can say, kindly and without guilt, 'I do my giving through causes I've chosen, so I don't donate in response to calls or appeals.' That is a complete, generous, and entirely reasonable position. A planned, intentional giver does a great deal of good while being almost immune to the urgency and emotional pressure that charity scams rely on.

GOOD TO KNOW

Decide your giving in advance: pick a few vetted causes and support them directly. Then you can let every unsolicited appeal pass, knowing your generosity already has a safe home.

13. Protecting Against Repeat Targeting

Why givers get more appeals.

It is worth knowing that once you give — to anyone, scam or legitimate — you may find yourself receiving more appeals, including more scams. This happens because donor information is bought and sold, and because scammers keep lists of people who have given before, especially those who gave to a scam, as proven 'soft touches.' Being generous can, unfortunately, make you a repeat target, which is one more reason to give deliberately and through channels you control.

A particularly nasty version targets previous charity-scam victims specifically, with scammers posing as the same or a new charity, or even as investigators or fund-recovery services offering to get a prior donation back. As with other scams, there is no legitimate service that recovers your donation for an upfront fee, and a flood of follow-up appeals after you have given is a sign your information is circulating. Treat renewed pressure, especially referencing a past gift, with heightened caution.

To limit repeat targeting, give through established charities that handle your information responsibly, be cautious about where you enter your details, and consider declining to have your information shared when a charity offers that option. And simply expect more appeals after you give, so you are not caught off guard — the increase is about your information circulating, not about genuine new needs. Your planned, controlled giving remains the steady anchor amid the appeals that will keep coming.

WATCH OUT

Giving can lead to more appeals, as donor lists get sold and scammers keep lists of past givers. A 'recovery service' offering to get a past donation back for a fee is itself a scam.

14. Helping a Generous Loved One

Guiding kindness without crushing it.

If you have a loved one, perhaps an older parent, who is warm-hearted and gives readily to appeals, you may worry about their vulnerability to charity scams without wanting to dampen their beautiful generosity. The goal is to guide their kindness to safe channels, not to make them cynical or to control their giving, which would both wound them and be unnecessary. Approach it with respect for their generous spirit, which is something to honor, not manage.

Help them set up a giving plan they control: talk together about the causes they love, verify those charities, and set up easy, direct ways for them to support them. Then they have thoughtful outlets for their generosity and can more easily let unsolicited appeals pass. Share the simple safe-giving habits — give on your own terms, check first, never by gift card or crypto, no pressure — as sensible practices anyone would follow, framed around making sure their kindness does the most good.

Keep the open door, too: let your loved one know they can always run an appeal by you before giving, with no judgment, as a friendly second opinion rather than oversight. If they have given to a scam, respond with compassion and never shame, since embarrassment will only make them hide future giving. The aim throughout is a loved one who gives joyfully and safely, with their generous heart fully intact and simply pointed toward causes that are real. Their kindness is a gift to the world; you are just helping it land well.

WATCH OUT

Don't dampen a loved one's generosity — guide it. Help them build a giving plan to vetted causes they love, so their kindness has safe outlets and unsolicited appeals can pass.

15. If You've Given to a Fake

Steps to take, without shame.

If you realize you have donated to a fake charity or a fraudulent appeal, take a breath and act promptly, and please set aside any shame — you acted out of generosity, and the fault lies entirely with the criminals who exploited it. Depending on how you gave, there may be steps to recover the money or at least to protect yourself from further harm, and reporting helps protect others from the same con.

- 1 If you paid by card or check, contact your bank or card company right away, explain it was a charity scam, and ask whether it can be stopped or reversed.
- 2 If you gave by gift card, contact that card company's fraud line with the numbers and receipts, quickly.
- 3 Stop any recurring donations you may have unknowingly signed up for.
- 4 Watch for more appeals and 'recovery' offers, which often follow, and treat them as further scams.
- 5 Report it to the FTC at [ReportFraud.ftc.gov](https://www.reportfraud.ftc.gov), the Ohio Attorney General (who oversees charities) at 800-282-0515, and the charity watchdogs.

GOOD TO KNOW

Report fake charities to the Ohio Attorney General, which oversees charity registration in the state, as well as to the FTC. Your report helps shut the fake down and warns others.

16. A Word on Faith-Based Giving

Scammers exploit trust in the church, too.

For many people, especially here in our communities, a great deal of giving flows through the church and faith-based causes, and it is worth a gentle word, because scammers exploit that trust as readily as any other. Fraudulent appeals pose as missions, religious charities, faith-based disaster relief, or even as fellow congregants or clergy in need. The deep trust within a faith community is precisely what makes these cons effective, since an appeal wrapped in shared faith can feel beyond question.

A few patterns are worth watching. Be cautious of unsolicited appeals that invoke faith to lower your guard, of 'missionaries' or 'ministries' you cannot independently verify, and of messages that appear to come from your pastor or a church member urgently needing money — a scam that mirrors the family-impostor con, sometimes using a hacked or spoofed account. As always, a sacred-sounding cause with an urgent, untraceable payment request deserves the same verification as any other, not less.

The safe approach fits naturally with how faith communities already work. Give through your own church and the established, verifiable ministries it recognizes and vouches for, rather than through unsolicited appeals that invoke faith to reach you. If a message seems to come from your pastor or a fellow member asking for money, verify it in person or by a known number — real church leaders will understand and appreciate the care. Your generosity toward faith and mission is a beautiful thing; routing it through channels your

community trusts simply ensures it serves the good it is meant to.

WATCH OUT

A message from 'your pastor' or a 'fellow member' urgently needing money may be a hacked or spoofed account. Verify in person or by a known number before giving — the real person won't mind.

17. Questions People Ask Me

The ones that come up again and again.

The appeal used a real, well-known charity's name — doesn't that mean it's safe? Not necessarily. Scammers impersonate real charities, and some use names nearly identical to genuine ones. Verify the exact organization through an independent watchdog, and give through its own official site that you reached yourself, not through the appeal's link.

A caller said it was for local police or firefighters — surely that's legitimate? Those causes are commonly invoked by scammers precisely because people respect them, and even some real solicitations are run by for-profit fundraisers that pass on little. Don't pledge on the call. If you want to support local first responders, give directly to a verified local organization you reached yourself.

Is online giving safe? Yes, when you reach the charity's official site the right way — by typing its address or following a watchdog's verified link after checking the charity — and give by card there. The danger is only in following a link from an appeal, which can lead to a fake site. Reached correctly, online giving is convenient and safe.

How can I give quickly after a disaster without risking a scam? Keep a short list of a few reputable disaster-relief charities you've already vetted, so when a crisis strikes you can give to them directly and immediately through their official sites, skipping the flood of fake appeals entirely. Pre-vetting is the key to fast, safe disaster giving.

18. A Five-Minute Safe-Giving Setup

Make your generosity scam-proof.

A little preparation lets you give freely and safely, turning your generosity into something scammers cannot easily hijack. Do these once and you will be able to respond to any need — even an urgent disaster — with confidence that your gift reaches real people. It is a small setup for a lot of peace of mind and a lot of good done.

- 1 Pick a few causes you care about and verify them once through an independent watchdog (Give.org, Charity Navigator).
- 2 Save the official websites of those vetted charities, including a couple that do disaster relief.
- 3 Adopt the rule: give on your own terms, directly, never in response to an appeal that found you.
- 4 Never give by gift card, wire, or cryptocurrency; use a check or a card on the charity's official site.
- 5 Decide your polite decline for unsolicited appeals: 'I give through causes I've already chosen.'
- 6 Keep the open door with loved ones: 'Run any appeal by me first, no judgment.'

GOOD TO KNOW

Pre-vet a few charities (including disaster-relief ones) and save their official sites. Then you can give fast and safely to any need, skipping the flood of fakes entirely.

19. Reporting It — and Why It Helps

A few minutes that protect the next person.

Reporting a scam can feel pointless once the money is gone, but it genuinely matters. Reports help investigators link cases together, give platforms and phone carriers the evidence to shut fakes down, and warn others before they are caught. You do not need to have lost money to report — flagging an attempt is valuable too. It takes only a few minutes, and it turns a bad experience into something that helps your neighbors.

- Report to the Federal Trade Commission at [ReportFraud.ftc.gov](https://reportfraud.ftc.gov), the national clearinghouse for scams. You can also call 1-877-382-4357.
- Report online or financial crime to the FBI at ic3.gov, their internet-crime complaint center — especially for larger losses or cryptocurrency.

- Contact the Ohio Attorney General's consumer protection team at 800-282-0515 or through ohioattorneygeneral.gov.
- If your identity may be exposed, visit IdentityTheft.gov for a step-by-step recovery plan.
- Report spam texts by forwarding them to 7726 (SPAM), and use the 'report' button inside apps and email.

I wrote a separate, step-by-step guide on reporting to the FTC, the FBI, and the Ohio Attorney General, with exactly what to write down and what to expect afterward. If the reporting steps feel like a lot, that is a perfect thing to call me about. I am glad to sit with you and help you file, so that your report actually reaches the people who can use it.

GOOD TO KNOW

You will usually not hear back from a report, and that is normal. Your report still joins a bigger picture that helps investigators and warns others, even when nothing lands in your own inbox.

20. When to Just Call Me

A calm second opinion costs you nothing.

If something about a charity or disaster-relief appeal, especially one that found you online has you second-guessing yourself, or you just want a steady second opinion before you do anything, please call me. There is never a charge to ask a scam question, and never any judgment. I would far rather spend a few minutes on the phone talking it through with you than hear later that something cost you money or worry. That is genuinely what I am here for, and it is some of the most satisfying work I do.

If you would like a hand in person, I come to homes all across Portage County. I can help you check something safely, tighten up your accounts and passwords after a close call, set your devices and routine so these scams have a harder time reaching you, and walk your whole family through a simple plan. We go at your pace, with no pressure and no rushing, and you come away feeling steadier.

GOOD TO KNOW

The best time to call is before you act — before you click, pay, or share anything. A quick 'does this seem right to you, Bill?' is one of my favorite kinds of call to get.

21. Contact Card & a Warm Close

Keep this page where you can find it again.

Bill's Home Tech — your local tech, Bill Davis, owner and only tech. Phone or text: (330) 200-8042. Email: bill@billshometech.com. Web: billshometech.com. Service area: Atwater, Ravenna, Kent, Streetsboro, Aurora, Rootstown, Mantua, Garrettsville, Windham, Edinburg, Suffield — all of Portage County, Ohio.

- Free phone call: any scam question or close call, always free, with no judgment and no rushing.
- In-home scam-check visit: \$99 flat for the first visit, with a 30-day follow-up included.
- Remote help by screen-share, for when you would rather not wait for a visit.

Your generosity is a gift to the world — this guide just helps make sure it reaches the people you mean to help. Give on your own terms, to charities you've checked, and call me anytime an appeal feels off. I am a phone call away, and glad to help you give safely.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

The one rule

Choose the cause yourself, check the charity through an independent source, and give directly through its official site — not through any appeal that found you.

Red flags

- Pressure to give right now, especially after a disaster.
- Pay by gift card, wire, or cryptocurrency.
- A name nearly identical to a real charity.
- An unsolicited call, text, email, or crowdfunding link.
- A moving story and photos, but no verifiable organization.

Give safely

- 1 Don't pledge on the spot to any appeal.
- 2 Check the charity (Give.org, Charity Navigator, IRS, Ohio AG).
- 3 Reach its site by typing the address or a watchdog's link.
- 4 Give by check or card on the official site.
- 5 Pre-vet a few causes so disaster giving is fast and safe.

WATCH OUT

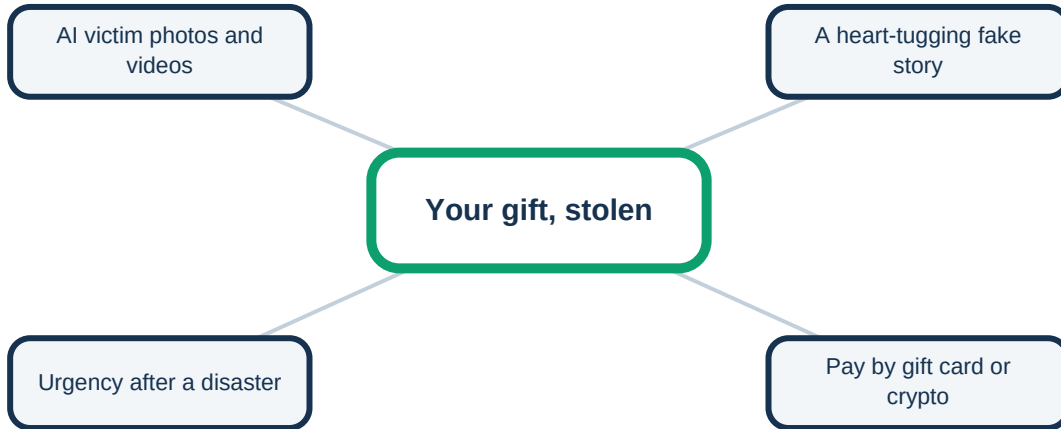
No real charity takes gift cards, wires to a person, or crypto. And a 'service' offering to recover a past donation for a fee is another scam.

AT A GLANCE

A Picture to Follow Along

How the Fake Appeal Works

AI makes the emotional hook cheap and convincing.



Don't judge the appeal - choose and check the charity yourself.

Illustration - a schematic; details vary by device and setup.

AT A GLANCE

A Second Look

The Safe Way to Give

Be the one who chooses, checks, and gives.

- 1 An emotional appeal moves you to help
- 2 Don't give through the appeal that found you
- 3 Decide for yourself whom you want to help
- 4 Check the charity via an independent watchdog
- 5 Give directly through its official site (typed yourself)
- 6 Never by gift card, wire, or crypto

A real charity gladly takes your gift tomorrow, after you've checked.

Illustration - a schematic; details vary by device and setup.

BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.



HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

In-home visit — \$99 flat for your first visit. No contracts and no surprise charges, and a 30-day follow-up is included.

Remote Support — \$49 for a screen-share session. I only connect with your permission, you watch the whole time, and you can end anytime. If I can't fix it over the screen-share, I refund the \$49 — and if it turns out you need me in person, that \$49 goes toward your visit. It's included free for Support Plan members (\$39/mo).

GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full \$99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Call or text **(330) 200-8042** · Book a visit: **billshometech.com/book** · **bill@billshometech.com**

This free guide is for general information only — not professional advice, and no substitute for your device's own manual. Any prices or outside products mentioned can change; please confirm current details before you buy. Please use your own good judgment and follow it at your own risk — for anything involving electricity, gas, water, or heights, stop and call a licensed professional. Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results. © 2026 Bill's Home Tech, LLC.