



After Las Vegas shooting, Nevada officials go after sham websites seeking donations

By Andrew Craft

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The Nevada Attorney General's office is investigating reports of fake online charities collecting donations on behalf of victims that were killed or wounded at a shooting at a country music festival in Las Vegas Oct. 1. Officials are partnering with GoFundMe and other social media sites to take down these fraudulent pages.

There has been at least one Facebook page that has been shut down in light of the recent tragedy that was soliciting fraudulent donations. The Attorney General's office is also aware of other complaints and pursuing those as well.

"There continue to be sham charities and websites seeking to profit from this horrific tragedy," said Nevada Attorney General Adam Laxalt. "Complaints from local consumers continue to be the best source of information for our Bureau of Consumer Protection in investigating claims of misrepresentation."

Crowdfunding websites do have liability protections for themselves in incidents like this and large insurance packages that can cover costs if they were made to pay out civil litigation settlements. "The problem is these guys are pretty slick, they don't make it easy to find them, the money will go to a fake bank account, the money will disappear, and you're unable to trace where it actually went," says Marie Napoli, a personal injury attorney who is not affiliated with any such cases in relation the shooting.

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The burden of researching such websites falls on those people who want to donate. If they're feeling charitable, they need to be vigilant in how and where they're directing their money.

The Attorney General's office put out guidance for people on how not to be scammed when donating. These include avoiding charities that ask for donations in cash or via wire transfer, refraining from making payments through credit card over the phone, taking the time to investigate people behind social media campaigns to make sure they're legitimate.

"Scammers tend to prey on two things: either greed or sympathy ...scams are often perpetrated on sympathetic causes, so step back and look at it and think it through. Oftentimes, people will have signs [on the website] - they'll have bad grammar or limited descriptions," said Alex Hamerstone, a tech expert and cyber analyst.

GoFundMe has policies in place for these types of fraudulent pages and works to counteract their effect in light of the shooting. It has set up a landing page with vetted charity efforts.

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"Our Trust & Safety Team is providing around-the-clock support and will continue to monitor the platform to ensure all of the money raised goes directly to the victims. We are reviewing all campaigns created in the aftermath of this terrible shooting and will stay in close touch with all organizers and beneficiaries to ensure the resources get to the right place," said Bobby Whithorne, a spokesperson for the company.

Scams like these remain the exception to the rule, says Hamerstone. Due to the cruel nature of exploiting a tragedy for financial gain, they get most of the attention even though there are only a few cases.

A GoFundMe page set up by Clark County Commissioner Steve Sisolak has raised over \$10 million dollars for victims of the Las Vegas shooting

"We've got kids that lost parents, they don't have parents anymore. We've got individuals who've lost their spouses, husbands and wives and sons and daughters, there's a tremendous amount of need ... they'll be needing surgeries for months and years to come and we'll be there to help them as much as we possibly can," said Sisolak.

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