



# news release

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BBB Serving Central, Northern & Western Arizona  
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## **BBB Offers Giving Tips in Wake of Loss of Arizona Firefighters**

(Prescott, AZ – July 1, 2013) Better Business Bureau (BBB) joins the nation in mourning the loss of the Prescott Fire Department's Granite Mountain Hotshots in the Yarnell Hill Fire. To ensure donations get into the right hands, BBB offers advice on charitable giving in the wake of this tragedy.

"Unfortunately as we have seen with the Newtown School shooting and Boston Marathon bombings, tragedy brings out scam artists," BBB President/CEO Matthew Fehling said. "While it is a natural reaction to want to help the victims' families and community through donations, we encourage donors to learn more about the charity before contributing."

BBB's Wise Giving Alliance - the national charity monitoring arm of BBB – provides free, reliable information on national charities at [give.org](http://give.org). The two local and national charities mentioned during today's press conference, The 100 Club of Arizona and the American Red Cross both meet BBB's 20 Standards for Charitable Accountability. According to the 100 Club of Arizona's BBB Charity Review, the organization "provides financial assistance to families of public safety officers and firefighters upon death or serious injury."

"In the coming days and weeks, we anticipate numerous well-intended charities, organizations and individuals will solicit donations in support of the families and other victims of the Yarnell Hill Fire," said Mary Hawkes, Director of the BBB Yavapai Branch office. "But consumers should use their donations wisely and check out how the money will be used, distributed and accounted for."

BBB advises the public to consider the following wise giving tips before responding to a text message, email, phone call, door-to-door or social media posting soliciting donations:

### **1. Thoughtful Giving**

Take the time to check out the charity to avoid wasting your generosity by donating to a questionable or poorly managed effort. Be proactive and find trusted charities that are providing assistance.

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## **2. Spread the Wise-Giving Word**

Remind friends and family to be cautious about giving requests in the wake of such a tragedy and ask them to spread the word as well. People are emotionally moved by events like these and may react before they have time to carefully consider.

## **3. State Government Registration**

About 40 of the 50 states require charities to register with a state government agency (usually a division of the State Attorney General's office) before they solicit for charitable gifts. If the charity is not registered, that may be a red flag.

## **4. Respecting Victims and Their Families**

Organizations raising funds should get permission from the families to use either the names of the victims and/or any photographs of them. Some charities raising funds for the Colorado movie theater and Newton school victims did not do this and were the subject of criticism from victims' families.

## **5. How Will Donations Be Used?**

Watch out for vague appeals that don't identify the intended use of funds. For example, how will the donations help victims' families? Also, unless told otherwise, donors will assume that funds collected quickly in the wake of a tragedy will be spent just as quickly. See if the appeal identifies when the collected funds will be used.

## **6. What if a Family Sets Up Its Own Assistance Fund?**

Some families may decide to set up their own assistance funds. Be mindful that such funds may not be set up as charities. Also, make sure that collected monies are received and administered by a third party such as a bank, CPA or lawyer. This will help provide oversight and ensure the collected funds are used appropriately (e.g., paying for funeral costs, counseling, and other tragedy-related needs.)

## **7. Online Cautions**

Never click on links to charities on unfamiliar websites or in texts or emails. These may take you to a lookalike website where you will be asked to provide personal financial information or click on something that downloads harmful malware into your computer. Don't assume that charity recommendations on Facebook, blogs or other social media sites have already been vetted.

## **8. Financial Transparency**

After funds are raised for a tragedy, it is even more important for organizations to provide an accounting of how funds were spent. Transparent organizations will post this information on their websites so that anyone can find out and not have to wait until the audited financial statements are available sometime in the future.

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## **9. Newly Created or Established Organizations**

While a personal giving choice, consider that an established charity will more likely have the experience to quickly address the circumstances and have a track record that can be evaluated. A newly formed organization may mean well, but will be difficult to research.

## **10. Tax Deductibility**

Not all organizations collecting funds to assist this tragedy are tax exempt as charities under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Donors can support non registered entities, but should keep in mind that if they want to take a deduction for federal income tax purposes, they will not be able to. In addition, contributions that are donor-restricted to help a specific individual/family are not deductible as charitable donations, even if the recipient organization is a charity.

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### **About BBB of Central, Northern & Western Arizona**

BBB is an unbiased organization that sets and upholds high standards for fair and honest business behavior. Businesses that earn BBB accreditation contractually agree and adhere to the organization's high standards of ethical business behavior. Incorporated locally in 1938, today your BBB serves communities in central, northern and western Arizona, supported by over 10,000 BBB Accredited Businesses. BBB provides objective advice, free BBB Business Reviews® and charity BBB Wise Giving Reports™, and educational information on topics affecting marketplace trust.

**About BBB Wise Giving Alliance:** BBB Wise Giving Alliance produces reports on over 1,300 nationally soliciting charitable organizations, and local BBBs report on another 10,000 local and regional charities. BBB Wise Giving Alliance does not rank charities but rather seeks to assist donors in making informed judgments by providing objective evaluations of national charities based on 20 standards that address charity governance, finances, fund raising, appeal accuracy, and other issues. The outcomes of the evaluations are available online at [www.give.org](http://www.give.org). BBB Wise Giving Alliance is an affiliate of the Council of Better Business Bureaus.

For more information or to schedule an interview with a BBB spokesperson, contact Mary Hawkes at 928-772-3410 or email [mhawkes@arizonabbb.org](mailto:mhawkes@arizonabbb.org).

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