

eFLORIDA CONSUMER **NEWSLETTER** November 2021

www.FloridaConsumerHelp.com

435-7352
1-800-HELP-FLA

352-9832
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GIVINGTUESDAY AND DONATING SAFELY



GivingTuesday will be observed on November 30th this year. This event first started in 2012 as a day that encouraged people to do good in their local communities. Since then, it has grown into a year-round global movement inspiring hundreds of millions of people to donate their time, talents, and treasures. GivingTuesday is an opportunity for people around the world to come together to thank, help, give, show kindness, and share what they have with those in need.

A recent [study of monetary giving](#) to nonprofit organizations revealed that total giving to charitable organizations in the United States increased in 2020 and that people are highly motivated to give in 2021. This just proves that, even in times of uncertainty, there is a deep reserve of generosity, which can make a significant difference in our communities.

Unfortunately, there are fraudsters that are all too willing to take advantage of that sense of generosity and use it to line their own pockets. Some charity scammers operate completely outside the law while using the same methods of “fundraising” that legitimate charities use, such as telemarketing, direct mail, social media, email, and door-to-door solicitations. Others may appear completely legit with all the proper registrations in place but pocket upwards of 90% of donations received to cover “administrative costs.”



Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), through its administration of the Florida Solicitation of Contributions Act, helps create a safe environment for individual donors to give confidently in response to needs in their community and to causes they care about. All charities soliciting within the state of Florida (excluding religious, educational, political and governmental agencies) are required to register and file financial information with FDACS. While it is up to the donor to determine if their contribution will be spent the way they intend, FDACS makes it easier for donors to access that information by making registration and financial documentation available online at FloridaConsumerHelp.com.

Donors can take the following precautions to protect themselves while still making a charitable impact:

- Don't respond to high pressure tactics. A legitimate charity will welcome your donation whenever you choose to make it.
- Take the time to do your own research. Search a charity's name or a cause with terms like "scam," "complaint," or "Highly rated."
- Don't give personally identifying information such as your Social Security number, date of birth, or bank account number to charitable solicitors.
- Ask how much of your donation will go to cover administrative costs like overhead and fundraising expenses. Every charitable organization will have operating expenses, but Wise Giving Alliance recommends that at least 65% of a charity's total expenses should go directly to serving its mission.
- Don't make a donation with cash or by gift card or wire transfer. Credit cards or checks are safer.
- Always obtain and save a printed copy of your donation or a receipt showing the amount of the contribution.
- Don't click on links in unsolicited emails, texts, Facebook, or Twitter fundraising messages. They can unleash malware.
- Don't assume pleas for help on social media or on crowdfunding sites like GoFundMe are legitimate, especially in the wake of disasters.
- Contact the FDACS toll-free hotline at 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352) or 1-800-FL-AYUDA (352-9832), en Español, or use the online Check-A-Charity tool at FloridaConsumerHelp.com to verify registration and financial information before making a charitable donation.



GivingTuesday emphasizes that everyone has something to give and every act of generosity counts, but not all individuals or organizations soliciting in the name of benevolence are true charities. By taking a few precautions, people can help ensure their donations are helping to fill a need and not just line a scammer's pocket.

AMAZON IMPERSONATORS: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

by Maria Mayo, Acting Associate Director, Division of Consumer Response and Operations

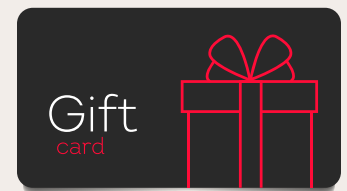
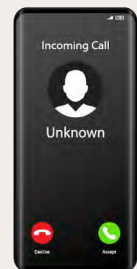
Has Amazon contacted you to confirm a recent purchase you didn't make or to tell you that your account has been hacked? According to the Federal Trade Commission's (FTC) new [Data Spotlight](#), since July 2020, about one in three people who have reported a business [impersonator scam](#) say the scammer pretended to be Amazon.



These scams can look a few different ways. In one version, scammers offer to “refund” you for an unauthorized purchase but “accidentally transfer” more than promised. They then ask you to send back the difference. What really happens? The scammer moves your own money from one of your bank accounts to the other (like your Savings to Checkings, or vice versa) to make it look like you were refunded. Any money you send back to “Amazon” is your money (not an overpayment) — and as soon as you send it out of your account, it becomes theirs. In another version of the scam, you're told that hackers have gotten access to your account — and the only way to supposedly protect it is to buy gift cards and share the gift card number and PIN on the back. Once that information is theirs, the money is, too.

Here are some ways to avoid an Amazon impersonator scam:

- **Never call back an unknown number.** Use the information on Amazon's website and not a number listed in an unexpected email or text.
- **Don't pay for anything with a gift card.** [Gift cards](#) are for gifts. If anyone asks you to pay with a gift card – or buy gift cards for anything other than a gift, it's a scam.
- **Don't give remote access to someone who contacts you unexpectedly.** This gives scammers easy access to your personal and financial information—like access to your bank accounts.



BE ON THE LOOK OUT FOR CONEHEAD TERMITES

Please help eradicate conehead termites from Florida by reporting possible sightings to FDACS. Populations are known in Broward County, and others may exist elsewhere in Florida due to human transport in wooden packing material, vegetative debris, furniture, and any item made of wood.

Unlike all other termites in South Florida, the soldier form of this termite species has a cone-shaped, dark brown head. Soldiers are difficult to identify with the naked eye due to their size, but the above-ground tunnels they construct are easily seen and may signify the presence of this species. Living mostly above ground, conehead termites travel to their feeding sites in narrow (usually 1/2-inch wide or less) brown tunnels on the sides of trees, houses, fences or other surfaces.



Conehead termites are pests of agriculture, natural areas, and structures. FDACS is working diligently to prevent this invasive termite from becoming permanently established and spreading throughout the state and asks Floridians to be on the lookout for these pests and to report any suspected sightings. To report a potential conehead termite infestation, call 1-888-397-1517 or email DPIHelpline@FDACS.gov.

For more information, pictures, FAQs, and a video on how to identify a conehead termite infestation, please visit the [Conehead Termite Eradication Program website](#).

STAY FOOD SAFE WITH YOUR HOLIDAY FEAST



Stay safe from foodborne illness this holiday season by handling your turkey properly and cooking it to a safe temperature. Follow the tips on Turkey (Poultry) Safety from the Division of Food Safety's [Consumer Resources and Outreach website](#). This website offers information on how to handle your turkey (poultry) properly, how long to store your holiday leftovers, a Fresh From Florida Osceola Turkey with Citrus Brine recipe, and video on practicing turkey safety among other resources.

You may also access Food Safety Tips for Your Holiday Turkey from the Centers for Disease Control website [here](#).

ABOUT THE FDACS DIVISION OF CONSUMER SERVICES

FDACS is Florida's state consumer protection agency responsible for regulating charities and handling consumer complaints. FDACS handles more than 400,000 consumer complaints and inquiries, oversees more than 500,000 regulated devices, entities, and products like gas pumps and grocery scales, performs over 61,000 lab analyses on products like gasoline and brake fluid, performs nearly 9,000 fair ride inspections, and returned over \$2.8 million to consumers through mediations with businesses.



The Division of Food Safety monitors food from the point of manufacturing and distribution through wholesale and retail sales to ensure the public of safe, wholesome and properly represented food products.

CLICK THE ICON ABOVE TO SEE THE LATEST RECALLS, MARKET WITHDRAWALS, & SAFETY ALERTS.



The Consumer Product Safety Commission provides consumer product recall information as part of the agency's mission to protect consumers and families from hazardous products.

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The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is the state's clearinghouse for consumer complaints, protection and information. Consumers who would like information about filing a complaint against a business or who believe fraud has taken place can visit us online at [FloridaConsumerHelp.com](https://www.floridacconsumerhelp.com) or contact the department's consumer protection and information hotline by calling 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352) or 1-800-FL-AYUDA (352-9832) for Spanish speakers.