

CHARITIES FOR VETERANS & FIRST RESPONDERS, CHECK THEM OUT BEFORE CONTRIBUTING

On a daily basis we receive letters and phone calls soliciting contributions for charities. Particularly prevalent are those organizations representing themselves as Law Enforcement and Fire Prevention (i.e., First Responders), and Veterans/Military.

You may be surprised to learn that these two categories have the worst performing reputation among charities. According to the American Institute of Philanthropy (AIP) (www.charitywatch.org), too many veterans (and first responder) charities choose to spend most of their donated dollars on direct mail and telemarketing solicitations, executive salaries, and other overhead expenses that do not directly benefit veterans or our active duty military.

Many of these so-called charities explain away their high overhead with excuses that do not wash under the light of day. The same may be said of some VSO fundraiser initiatives. Several of these are organizations that use their Congressional Charter or prominent supporters as evidence of reputability.

You may ask, how do I know where my contribution will go? How my contribution will be spent?

AIP lists several criteria, the foremost being the percent of contributions expended on fundraising costs. Overhead costs, including education, should be 35% or less. **Single digit overhead costs are attainable and provide the greatest confidence that the majority of the funds are going to our troops and veterans.** There are other criteria, but this one is basic.

AIP lists some 500 charities and rates them. Check the AIP website for the charity of interest to you, even if it is a well known veterans fund. If it is not listed, search the internet for a home page. If the fund is reputable, it will provide a balance sheet or a report of income and expenses for you to judge. Beware of fancy websites, celebrity endorsements, Congressional Charters and like certifications (including 501 (c) (3)), and other possible distractions. Avoid committing to pledges over the phone from telemarketers regardless of their affiliation.

It only takes a few minutes to check. Be vigilant and ensure our troops and veterans are supported with your contributions.

/ Jack Hilgers COL,USMC, Ret, March 2009

COL Jack Hilgers is the Legislative Rep for Hampton Roads (Virginia) Chapter of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA). He has extensive fundraising experience, and is active on the Virginia Council of Chapters (VCOC) of MOAA.