

Charity Doorstep Collections: Making an Informed Choice



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We're often asked to donate cash or goods on the doorstep – whether answering the door to someone with a collecting tin, or being asked to buy a magazine 'for charity'. Increasingly, householders also receive leaflets or envelopes for cash, or plastic bags through their letterboxes asking for donations of goods.

Whether you decide to give is entirely up to you, but it's important to know that not all these organisations are charities. Some may be collecting on behalf of a charity and some may be businesses who sell your donations for profit.

If it matters to you that your donation goes to charity, there are some key questions to ask before you give.

- 1. Do I want my goods or cash to go to charity?**
- 2. Does the organisation state that it is a charity or that it is collecting on behalf of a charity?**
- 3. Can the collector reassure you of their credentials?**
- 4. How can I check if the organisation is a charity?**
- 5. Where can I find further information?**

1. Do I want my goods or cash to go to charity?

- An organisation doesn't have to be a charity to carry out a public collection. Some collect on behalf of a charity, while others will sell your items for a profit – some may give an amount of the proceeds to charity and others may keep it all.
- Regulated charities in the UK must supply details including their most recent accounts, to their regulators, who monitor this information.
- Where a business collects goods to sell, it's up to them to decide how much, if anything, will actually go to the charity or any beneficiaries.

2. Does the organisation state that it is a charity or that it is collecting on behalf of a charity?

- An organisation can't call itself a charity if it isn't one. Regulators have powers to act against this and would be happy to receive any evidence.
- 'The needy in developing countries' and 'poor families in the Third World/Eastern Europe/Africa' are not specific charities – look for a charity name.
- Where the organisation states clearly that it is a charity, look for the charity number.
- Where a collection is for 'charitable purposes' or is 'on behalf of a charity', are you told which specific charity will benefit and how much of your donation will reach them?
- Ask if the charity has a formal agreement with the collector. If in doubt, you can give the charity a call to check if they're aware of the collection.

3. Can the collector reassure you of their credentials?

- Be wary of ID that looks photocopied or home-made, or leaflets with no address or land line telephone number.
- Make sure the collecting tin is sealed and undamaged.
- Where a leaflet or envelope appears to be from a charity, check the contact details – it's been known for a charity's name to be falsely used with different addresses or telephone numbers.
- Some organisations make a small donation to charity and use the subsequent 'thank you' letter as proof of an agreement with the charity – it's not.
- If the organisation is reluctant to answer your questions or give you information, think twice about giving.

4. How can I check if the organisation is a charity?

- All charities registered in Scotland can be checked on the [online Scottish Charity Register](#) published by the Scottish Charity Regulator.

- All charities registered in England and Wales can be checked on the [Charity Commission's online register](#).
- In Northern Ireland, charities can be checked on the [Charity Commission for Northern Ireland online register](#).
- Note that a company number is not a charity number – it just means that it's a registered business. Check that any number given is the registered charity number for that charity.

Charity numbers in Scotland start SC0[zero] then five numbers: SC012345.

5. Where can I find further information?

You can contact the charity regulators as follows:

- [The Scottish Charity Regulator](#)
- [Charity Commission for England and Wales](#)
- [Charity Commission for Northern Ireland](#)

It's your choice

If you're concerned or suspicious, consider giving your donation direct to the charity or taking your goods to a charity shop. Some charities have reception points for goods and most offer ways for you to give money and allow the charity to claim tax relief on your donation.

Above all, don't feel pressured to give on the doorstep – it's your choice. All genuine charities will be happy to receive your donation by other means.

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