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Beware of Scams and Hoaxes After Disasters

[<web-link for this article>](#)

Disasters often bring out the best in people, and our thoughts go out to those struggling to help others or heroically striving to prevent further nuclear disaster, often at great risk or sacrifice, after the earthquake in Japan.

However, disasters also bring out the worst in some people, who see the news as an opportunity to trick or cheat others. The deceptions are based on mis-information and naturally they use telecommunications, and the internet in particular, to spread their lies. So, although they are not strictly information security issues, here we look at a couple of examples that have emerged in the past few days.

Causing Panic

This hoax message was spread by SMS and also reported on websites:

BBC FLASHNEWS : Japan Government confirms radiation leak at Fukushima nuclear plants. Asian countries should take necessary precautions. If rain comes, remain indoors first 24 hours. Close doors and windows. Swab neck skin with betadine where thyroid area is, radiation hits thyroid first. Take extra precautions. Radiation may hit Phillipine at around 4 pm today. If it rains today or in the next few days in Hong Kong. Do not go under the rain. If you get caught out, use an umbrella or raincoat, even if it is only a drizzle. Radioactive particles, which may cause burns, alopecia or even cancer, may be in the rain.

The BBC issued no such warning, and [have confirmed](#) the message is fake. The message shows some curious features: a mixture of technical (thyroid, alopecia - meaning hair loss) and non-technical (rain, burns) language and unlikely specificity - why 4pm? This adds to the fear caused by the hoax, the technical terms add to the authority of the message, while the non-technical terms build the concern.

Saying that the news comes from an authoritative source, such as the BBC, is a common feature of hoaxes. Check with the source directly yourself.

The origin of this hoax is unknown. One possibility is it was simply for the "fun" or sense of power from making people panic. Another possibility is raised by the mention of betadine - the brand-name of an antiseptic cream. Why is just one brand-name mentioned instead of a class of medicine? Perhaps someone has a stock of this cream, and is trying to induce panic buying to inflate the price?

Stealing Donations

Compassionate people all over the world want to donate to the relief efforts, who could be so despicable to try to take these gifts? The writer of this fraudulent message, for one:

Date: Tue, 15 Mar 2011 09:08:57 -0700 (PDT)
From: AT&T Support Team-London <japanrelief---fund@XXX.net>
Reply-To: japanrelieffund@XXXXXX.com
Subject: DONATE TO JAPAN EARTHQUAKE RELIEF EFFORTS!!!
To: undisclosed recipients: ; </japanrelief---fund@XXX.net>

SUPPORT TEAM-LONDON

Donate Now!

Japan Earthquake and Tsunami Victims

Japan was hit by one of the largest earthquakes ever recorded on Friday 11th March, 2011. The magnitude-8.9 quake spawned a deadly tsunami that slammed into the nation's east coast, leaving a huge swath of devastation in its wake. Hundreds of people are dead and many more are still missing or injured.

Japan has often donated when other countries have experienced disasters, such as when Hurricane Katrina impacted the United States. AT&T Support Team-London is the Number One (No.1) organization in London-United Kingdom that is working on relief and recovery in the region.

AT&T SUPPORT TEAM-LONDON: Emergency Operation Centers has been opened in the affected areas and staffed by the chapters. This disaster is on a scale larger than the Japanese Red Cross can typically manage. Donations to the AT&T Support Team-London can be allocated for the International Disaster Relief Fund, which then deploys to the region to help.

Relief aid workers from the AT&T Support Team-London have already been arriving at Sendai City with relief materials.

Donations have been grouped into two categories:

* Group A [\$100USD TO \$1,000.00USD]

* Group B [\$1,000.00USD AND ABOVE]

For sake of urgency; donations are to be made payable immediately via WESTERN UNION MONEY TRANSFER and directly to our donations account liaison officer [XXXXX XXXXXXXX]:

PAY WESTERN UNION MONEY TRANSFER LONDON;

RECEIVER: XXXXX XXXXXXXX

LOCATION: 80 VICTORIA STREET, LONDON SW1 5JL. UK.

After payment/donation as above, please provide us via return email the follow information below as they appear on the Western Union Money Transfer receipt;

1. Name and Address of Sender***
2. Exact Amount Sent***
3. MTCN

Note: At AT&T Support Team-London we are committed to protecting your privacy as a STANDARD practice. We shall not share your information unless you have previously indicated that you are happy for us to do so.

Hope to receive your donation soon, as thousands awaits your help.

Please send return email donations details to: japanrelieffund@XXXXXX.com

Yours Sincerely

XXXXXX XXXX

DIRECTOR; PIONEER TEAM

AT&T SUPPORT TEAM-LONDON.

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM.

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Certain parts of this message have been replaced with X's, to prevent accidents. Note the use of a copyright warning to make the message look more authentic. Of course, AT&T did not send this message.

These are unlikely to be the only two hoaxes or scams in the wake of the earthquake, so be sceptical, check the original sources, don't rely on copies sent from friends, however well-meaning. If you think you should forward a message, think twice, check the source, and include a link to the source in your message. When donating, check what you are donating to. Donate through the usual channel you use to contact that charity. If you are donating online, check the SSL certificate of the website.

More Information

['Radiation' text message is fake
Betadine](#)

Hong Kong Police to issue Web Guidelines

[<web-link for this article>](#)

Assistant Commissioner of the Hong Kong Police Peter Hunt has said that new guidelines for officers' use of the internet will be issued. He led a review in response to high-profile incidents, including [disclosure of confidential data](#) and posting of photos taken on-duty on Facebook. The review focussed on the use of social networking sites.

Police officer associations welcomed the proposed guidelines as long as the restrictions were balanced with the right to free expression.

Like other public servants, the Police are not allowed to use work computers for gambling, pornography or personal investments.

Although the development of official policy is a lengthy process, the Force's newspaper, *OffBeat*, has [published](#) a [series](#) of articles on basic information security advice.

More Information

[Police to get new guidelines on use of Web](#)
[OffBeat Issue 936: Information Security Tips Series Laptop, Netbook, Tablet Security\(2\)](#)
[OffBeat Issue 938: Information Security Tips Series Laptop, Netbook, Tablet Security \(2\)](#)



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