



Oct. 16, 2018
DR-4399-FL NR 007
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News Release

Beware of Fraud and Scams

ATLANTA – When natural disasters occur, it is common for people to take advantage of survivors by posing as official disaster aid workers or as relatives trying to help survivors complete their applications.

Survivors should be aware of fraud and scams and report any suspicious activity or potential fraud from scam artists, identity thieves and other criminals.

Survivors should also be aware that this kind of situation doesn't happen only at the beginning of the response to the disaster when people might be more vulnerable. It can happen anytime. It is important to know that FEMA does not endorse any commercial businesses, products or services.

Floridians need to know common tactics used by these criminals, such as phone calls from people claiming to work for FEMA. The caller might ask for the survivor's Social Security number and income or banking information. Giving out this type of information can help an unscrupulous person make a false claim for assistance or commit identity theft.

These are common post-disaster fraud practices survivors should be vigilant of:

Housing inspectors claiming to represent FEMA

- Be cautious if somebody asks for your nine-digit registration number. FEMA inspectors will never ask for this information. They already have it in their records.
- FEMA inspectors never require banking or other personal information such as a Social Security number.
- Ask the inspectors to show you their identification badge. Federal employees and contractors always wear an official government or government contractor badge to identify themselves.
- Call FEMA at **800-621-3362 (TTY 800-462-7585)** if you are suspicious of someone who says they're a housing inspector sent by FEMA.

Fake offers of local or federal aid

- Don't trust someone who asks for money. Federal and local disaster workers do not solicit or accept money. FEMA and U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) staff never charge applicants for disaster assistance, inspections or help in filling out applications.

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- Don't believe anyone who promises a disaster grant and asks for large cash deposits or advance payments in full.
- Report suspected fraud to the Florida Attorney General's Office by calling 866-9-NO-SCAM or file a complaint online at MyFloridaLegal.com.

Avoiding fraudulent building contractors

- Use licensed or verified local contractors backed by reliable references.
- Don't pay more than half the costs of repairs in advance.
- Demand that contractors detail the job to be done with guarantees in writing.
- Check with the Florida Attorney General's Office at 866-9-NO-SCAM to see if there are complaints against a company or contractor.

If you suspect fraud, call the National Center for Disaster Fraud Hotline at **866-720-5721**.

Trusted Information Sources

A rumor control page has been set up to dispel false information about Hurricane Michael: fema.gov/hurricane-michael-rumor-control.

Unfortunately, criminals can exploit disasters by sending fraudulent communications through email or social media and by creating phony websites designed to solicit contributions. Tips may be reported 24/7 to the National Center for Disaster Fraud at **866-720-5721**. Or, email disaster@leo.gov.

For a list of locations where survivors can obtain commodities (water, food, etc.), visit www.floridadisaster.org/info

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FEMA's mission: Helping people before, during, and after disasters.