

Avoid Contractor Fraud, Scams in Wake of Tropical Storm Lee

ALBANY, N.Y. – New York residents whose properties were damaged by Hurricane Irene are urged to be alert for and report potential fraud during recovery and rebuilding efforts, officials with the New York State Emergency Management Office (NYSEMO) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) said today.

The aftermath of a storm like Irene can bring out the best in disaster-affected communities, but such events can also attract opportunists and con artists. Homeowners can follow some simple steps to avoid being scammed.

Be suspicious if a contractor:

- Demands cash or full payment up front for repair work.
- Has no physical address or identification.
- Urges you to borrow to pay for repairs, then steers you to a specific lender or tries to act as an intermediary between you and a lender.
- Asks you to sign something you have not had time to review.
- Wants your personal financial information to start the repair or lending process.

To avoid scams:

- Question strangers offering to do repair work and demand to see identification.
- Do your own research before borrowing money for repairs. Compare quotes, repayment schedules and rates. If they differ significantly, ask why.
- Never give any personal financial information to an unfamiliar person.
- Never sign any document without first reading it fully. Ask for an explanation of any terms or conditions you do not understand.

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Avoid Contractor Fraud

If you believe you are the victim of a contracting scam or price gouging, contact local law enforcement and report it to the New York State Office of the Attorney General. Call the Consumer Helpline at 1-800-771-7755 or find a complaint form online at www.ag.ny.gov

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has information that can help you be smart about [home improvement loans](#). Find out more about federal and community-based programs, as well as general consumer advice.

These are not the only post-disaster scams you may encounter. For more information about avoiding charitable giving scams, visit the Federal Trade Commission's website at <http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2011/05/homerepair.shtm>

Many legitimate persons -- insurance agents, FEMA Community Relations personnel, local inspectors and real contractors -- may have to visit your storm-damaged property. Survivors could,

however, encounter people posing as inspectors, government officials or contractors in a bid to obtain personal information or collect payment for repair work. Your best strategy to protect yourself against fraud is to ask to see identification in all cases and to safeguard your personal financial information. Please keep in mind that local, state and federal employees **DO NOT** solicit or accept money for public services.

All FEMA employees and contractors will have a laminated photo ID. A FEMA shirt or jacket alone is not proof of identity. FEMA generally will only request an applicant's Social Security or bank account numbers during the initial registration process. However FEMA inspectors may require verification of identity. FEMA and U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) staff never charge applicants for disaster assistance, inspections or help to fill out applications. FEMA inspectors verify damages but do not recommend or hire specific contractors to fix homes.

FEMA's mission is to support our citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards.

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