

Beware: Disaster Survivors Can be Victims of Fraud and Identity Theft

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AUSTIN, Texas – A recent case of attempted fraud in Texas underscores how disaster survivors can be victimized by fraudsters.

A Texas family received a bogus “notice” sporting the FEMA logo, assuring the family that it qualified for large sums of assistance. All they needed to do was to put a few thousand dollars in cash into an envelope and leave it in their mailbox. FEMA would come around and pick it up. Then the family would get a fat payoff in assistance. The notice was a total scam.

The family was also instructed to provide all the information they had given to FEMA, a potentially disastrous opening for further exploitation. And, they were asked to add the state and city taxes to the shakedown amount.

This attempt at fraud was no surprise to federal officials. In nearly every disaster, fraud has become a serious problem. Many people have been deceived and many perpetrators have been sent to federal prison for long terms.

Another scam is to contact survivors who have not registered with FEMA or the Small Business Administration and try to extract money or information. When this happens, it is a good bet someone’s personal data has been compromised.

FEMA is seeing a surge in fraudulent activity, including schemes like the above, fake registrations, applicants lying about their situations, and so on.



FEMA and SBA never charge any amount whatsoever for services, home inspections, grants, disaster-loan applications or anything else. And, federal grants are not taxable by any authority.

If you get any suspicious correspondence from FEMA or SBA, visit a disaster recovery center as soon as possible to verify the missive's authenticity. Never give information to anyone who is not a confirmed representative of any local, state or federal agency. All FEMA officials carry clear identification, and survivors should avoid cooperating with anyone who has no ID. Impostors often wear FEMA gear that has been stolen or is fake. FEMA gear is not enough for identification, any federal official should show their identification or badge.

If you suspect your personal information has been appropriated, immediately get in touch with FEMA at 800-621-3362 or 800-462-7585 for TTY users. Applicants who use VRS or 711 can call 800-621-3362.

A fraud complaint may be completed online at the Department of Homeland Security Inspector General's website (<http://www.oig.dhs.gov>), faxed to 202-254-4297 or mailed to: DHS Office of Inspector General: Mail Stop 0305; Department of Homeland Security; 245 Murray Drive SW; Washington DC 20528-0305.

FEMA also recommends you monitor your credit report for any accounts or changes you do not recognize. If you discover someone is using your information, you will need to take additional steps, including filing a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission through their website: IdentityTheft.gov.

Stay vigilant and protect yourself against identity theft and fraud.

