

Disaster Survivors Can be Victims of Fraud, Identity Theft

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AUSTIN, Texas – State and federal recovery officials urge residents affected by the severe storms and flooding in South Texas to watch for and report any suspicious activity or potential fraud.

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.

As government agencies and charitable groups begin providing disaster assistance, scam artists, identity thieves and other criminals may attempt to prey on vulnerable survivors. The most common post-disaster fraud practices include phony housing inspectors, fraudulent building contractors, bogus pleas for disaster donations and fake offers of state or federal aid.

Scam attempts can be made over the phone, by mail or email, text or in person. Unfortunately, there seems to be no limit to the inventiveness of those wanting to commit fraud. Residents are asked to remain alert, ask questions and require photo identification when someone claims to represent a government agency.

Survivors also should keep in mind that federal and state workers never ask for or accept money and always carry identification badges. There is no fee required to apply for or to get disaster assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the U.S. Small Business Administration or the state.

Those who question the validity of a contact or suspect fraud are encouraged to call the toll-free FEMA Disaster Fraud Hotline at 866-720-5721. Complaints also may be made by contacting local law enforcement agencies.

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.



FEMA

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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.

