

Survivors Beware! Fraud, Scams Flourish After Disasters

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CLANTON, Ala. – After a disaster, scam artists, identity thieves and other criminals often attempt to take advantage of disaster survivors. Federal and Alabama emergency management officials urge residents to watch for and report any suspicious activity.

When a disaster strikes, unscrupulous people may try to take advantage of survivors by posing as official disaster aid workers or even as relatives trying to help survivors complete their applications.

Common post-disaster fraud practices include:

Fake offers of state or federal aid: Federal and state workers do not solicit or accept money. FEMA and U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) personnel never charge applicants for disaster assistance, inspections or help in completing applications.

Phony housing inspectors: Owners/applicants may be especially vulnerable to phony housing inspectors claiming to represent FEMA. Ask to see the inspector's identification badge. All federal employees carry official, laminated photo identification. Housing inspectors have each applicant's nine-digit registration number. Inspectors will call you on the telephone to make an appointment; they will not contact you by email.

There may be occasions when a FEMA representative must contact you to verify personal data. You should request a FEMA identification number from the caller. If you are unsure of the caller's identification or you are suspicious of someone who says they're a housing inspector sent by FEMA, call the FEMA Hotline at **800-621-3362 (TTY 800-462-7585)**.

Phony government workers: You may be contacted by scam artists posing as disaster workers who are seeking money for services. Federal and local disaster



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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. Nor will federal disaster employees promise a disaster grant.

Fraudulent charitable solicitations: A list of reputable charities that are approved by the Better Business Bureau's Wise Giving Alliance is available at Give.Org. Criminals exploit survivors by sending fraudulent communications through email or social media and by creating phony websites designed to solicit contributions.

The Alliance advises "do not respond to unsolicited emails, watch out for pushy telemarketers and look out for fake charities that sound real by using similar names." For more information about avoiding charitable giving scams, visit the Federal Trade Commission's website at www.consumer.ftc.gov/features/scam-alerts.

Rental listing scams: The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has information on how rental listing scams work. For instance, scammers know that finding the right apartment or vacation rental can be hard work, and a seemingly good deal is hard to pass up. Learn more at www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0079-rental-listing-scams.

If you have knowledge of fraud, waste or abuse, you can report these tips - 24 hours a day, seven days a week - to the FEMA Disaster Fraud Hotline at **866-720-5721**. Or, email disaster@leo.gov.

If you believe you or a loved one has become a victim of a scam or identity theft, report it immediately to your local police or sheriff's department, or contact the office of the **Alabama Attorney General**:

- Office Main Number: **334-242-7300**
- Consumer Protection Hotline, **800-392-5658**
- Office of Victim Assistance: **800-626-7676**
- <http://www.ago.state.al.us/Page-Consumer-Protection>

For the latest information on Hurricane Sally, visit <https://www.fema.gov/disaster/4563>



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