



Attorney General Doug Peterson

News Release

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Weathering the Storm-Tips to Avoid a Second Disaster

LINCOLN – Home repair and cleanup frauds are especially common after a natural disaster hits. Unfortunately, these storms tend to attract con artists and criminals who are hoping to take advantage of distressed homeowners. It's important to be very careful about hiring anyone to work on your home.

During past storms, consumers have reported heartbreaking stories of paying large sums of money upfront to get a construction job started, only to receive nothing in return or subpar service. In most reports received by the office, a scammer knocks on someone's door shortly following a natural disaster and uses high-pressure sales tactics to trick the consumer into signing a contract. The contract requires a large upfront fee, often in cash, to be paid before the work begins. Many of these individuals aren't even contractors at all; they are scam artists who travel from town-to-town, taking money for work and underperforming or not performing at all, then moving on before any money can be recovered.

The best way to protect yourself from frauds and scams after a natural disaster is to stay alert and be cautious. The following information will help you understand what to look for and how to stay away from the most common post-disaster scams.

- **Check references.** Don't hire anyone to work on your home without getting references and checking out the business online. Also confirm that the business or individual is licensed to do work in the State of Nebraska.
- **Be cautious.** While reputable contractors may solicit door-to-door offering rebuilding or cleaning services after a natural disaster, this is also the way disreputable contractors and scam artists often operate. Check that the contractor's vehicle has signs or markings on it with the business name and phone number and research the business.
- **Never pay a home contractor or any other vendor in cash.** Only pay by credit card or personal check. Be sure not to pay in full up front.

- **Do not sign over your insurance settlement check.** Furthermore, stay involved with your insurance claim. Make sure to keep in contact with your insurance company directly and not only through the contractor.
- **Always ask for written contracts containing estimates and timeframes in which the work will be completed.**
- **Beware of companies offering to cover your deductible.** Don't fall for something that is too good to be true. They may be cutting corners on your job to make that money back.
- **Get at least two quotes before hiring anyone.**
- **Don't be pressured.** Don't fall for hiring someone who is offering a "one-day-only" special or a discount for hiring him or her on the spot.

If you suspect these scams are occurring in your neighborhood, promptly notify local law enforcement and contact the Nebraska Consumer Protection Division at ago.nebraska.gov or call us at 800-727-6432.

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