

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM SCAM ARTISTS FOLLOWING WILDFIRE DAMAGE

Unfortunately, natural disasters present opportunities for scammers to take advantage of people when they're at their most vulnerable. If your house suffers damage from a wildfire, take the following steps to ensure anyone offering grant money or anyone hired to work on repairs is legitimate.

TO MAKE SURE YOUR HOME INSPECTOR IS LEGITIMATE:

- If a housing inspector comes by and claims to represent the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) or the Small Business Administration (SBA), ask to see the inspector's identification badge, which all federal employees and contractors are required to carry.
- Remember that FEMA and SBA staff will never ask to see your banking information or charge you for disaster assistance. Do not give out your personal information.
- Know that FEMA housing inspectors will not hire specific contractors to fix your damage.

TO MAKE SURE YOUR CONTRACTOR IS LEGITIMATE:

- Deal only with licensed contractors. Ask to see physical verification of the person's license.
- Check that the license is valid by calling the Contractor's State License Board toll-free at **1-800-321-2752**, or by visiting cslb.ca.gov.
- Ask for references.
- Get a written contract, and make sure it contains everything you've talked about in person. If it's not in the contract, the contractor can't be held accountable for making it happen.
- Don't pay in cash, and never pay for the entire project before the work is completed.

TO MAKE SURE YOU'RE NOT A VICTIM – OR PERPETRATOR – OF PRICE GOUGING:

- Price gouging laws prohibit raising rental housing costs by more than 10 percent following the declaration of a state of emergency. Please note that price gouging is a complicated issue – for more details, visit the California Attorney General's website at oag.ca.gov/consumers/pricegougingduringdisasters.
- You can check to see if a declaration of emergency is in effect by visiting gov.ca.gov.
- If you feel you're experiencing price gouging following a wildfire, you can file a complaint with the Attorney General's office by calling **1-800-952-5225**. You can also get a referral for a lawyer by contacting the State Bar at **866-442-2529** or visiting calbar.ca.gov.

