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727/595-2517

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For Immediate Release  
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Press Release  
Avoid Post-Storm Scams

Please see below a news release from Pinellas County Government regarding post storm scams:

**Pinellas: Avoid becoming a victim of a post-storm scam**

Many areas in the county have incurred severe property damage because of back-to-back impacts from Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton. Pinellas County Consumer Protection wants to remind residents to be cautious when hiring someone to make repairs. Avoid becoming a victim of a home improvement scam by recognizing these warning signs:

- Watch out for “fly-by-night” contractors who take deposits and do little or no work. Avoid dealing with anyone soliciting work door-to-door; take the opportunity to check them out first.
- Be wary of contractors who ask for advance payment in full. Pay upon completion or as the work progresses.
- Beware of any contractor who tells you that extensive or structural repairs do not require a permit. The contractor should pull the required building permits, not the homeowner.

Keep the following tips in mind to ensure that your repairs are completed satisfactorily:

- Deal only with licensed and insured contractors. Obtain their name, license number and proof of general liability and workers’ comp insurance.
- In a state of emergency, as we have now, verify the license status of state-certified contractors online at [www.myfloridalicense.com](http://www.myfloridalicense.com). A list of PCCLB-licensed, qualified and insured contractors can be found online using the [Contractor Search](#) feature.
- Be sure that you have a written contract that details the work to be completed. Also, retain proof of payment for the work in case you need it later.
- Require the contractor to supply a final affidavit indicating that all subcontractors and suppliers used on the job are paid in full.
- Ensure that the contractor has had the work inspected by the building department before you make final payment.

**Free resource for homeowners**

Florida’s Disaster Contractors Network (DCN) has been activated to support homeowners who may need help with emergency home repairs. DCN is a free resource founded by the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation (DBPR) designed to connect homeowners with licensed contractors and suppliers to perform emergency repairs. DCN also prevents homeowners from being preyed upon by unlicensed contractors through proactive education and outreach efforts. DBPR is the state agency that licenses and oversees Florida’s more than 87,000 construction industry licensees.

**How it works:** Once homeowners are safely able to assess their home repair needs, they are encouraged to log onto [DCNOnline.org](http://DCNOnline.org) and search by county for a list of Florida-licensed contractors in their local community who are providing these services.

**For Contractors/Suppliers:** While many Florida contractors and suppliers have already registered, there is still an opportunity for additional licensed contractors and suppliers to log onto [DCNOnline.org](http://DCNOnline.org) to register their licensed company.

### Price gouging

With the inclusion of Pinellas County in the Governor's declaration of a state of emergency, residents are protected by the state's price gouging law. Consumer Protection encourages residents who suspect price gouging to report it to authorities.

Effective only during a declared state of emergency, the price gouging law prohibits sharp increases in the price of essential commodities, such as food, water, shelter, ice, gasoline, lumber and equipment that is needed as a direct result of an official declared emergency. Violators are subject to civil penalties of \$1,000 per violation, up to a total of \$25,000 for multiple violations committed in a single 24-hour period.

Residents who suspect local price gouging can report it to Pinellas County Consumer Protection at (727) 464-6200 (beginning Monday, Oct. 14) or online at [www.pinellas.gov/consumer](http://www.pinellas.gov/consumer) and are also encouraged to report it to the Attorney General's hotline at 1-866-9-NO-SCAM.

### Charity scams

Be wary of solicitations for charitable contributions on behalf of Hurricanes Helene and Milton. All charities soliciting within Florida – excluding religious, educational, political and governmental entities – are required to register and file financial information with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. To check whether a charitable organization is properly registered, visit [Check-A-Charity](#), which provides information reported to the department.

Here are additional recommendations from Consumer Protection:

- Always be wary of people soliciting on behalf of victims of natural disasters.
- Do not judge an organization based solely on its name. Many organizations have names that sound like those of reputable organizations but may be fraudulent.
- Ask for a copy of the charity's financial report to determine how much of your contribution is going toward the cause and how much goes to administrative and fundraising costs.
- Beware of pressure tactics to give immediately. Don't let emotional appeals or photos persuade you into giving. Make sure the solicitation is legitimate.
- Some charitable groups employ paid solicitors, which means not all of your donation will go to the charitable cause. Check to see if this is the case.
- Ask if donations are tax deductible.
- Never give cash. Contribute by check made payable to the organization, never to an individual's name.
- For more information on how to protect yourself after a storm, visit: [Pinellas County Post-Disaster Consumer Tips](#). To report suspected fraud, call (727) 464-6200.