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NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 2, 2010

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State and Local Officials Warn of Fraud and Abuse

Fraud can be a big problem in areas struck by disasters, according to the Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency (RIEMA) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

The damage caused by the severe storms and flooding across Rhode Island may leave many homeowners, renters, and business owners vulnerable to fraudulent offers of help, state and federal disaster officials say. As a result, residents may be the target of some familiar scams.

RIEMA and FEMA, in partnership with Governor Donald Carcieri, Attorney General Patrick Lynch, and the Rhode Island State Police, warn the public of the most common scams and fraudulent tactics, as well as what to look for .

Consumers who feel that they have been a victim of fraud or abuse may file a complaint with the Rhode Island State Police Financial Crimes Division at 401-444-1201 to the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Unit at 401-274-4400.

Fake offers of help getting state or federal aid

Some scam artists walk around carrying a clipboard with official-looking forms; this is no proof they are with a state, federal or voluntary agency serving those affected by the disaster. Never reveal personal information when you are unsure of the person or organization.

FEMA-contracted inspectors call to schedule an appointment before visiting a home. The inspectors always wear a photo ID and know the applicant's name and registration number.

Never pay a fee for help. Remember FEMA never charges for disaster assistance.

Misrepresenting FEMA agents and inspectors

FEMA inspectors carry official photo identification.

- FEMA ID includes the person's photo and name. The FEMA seal and the ID's expiration date are highly visible.
- FEMA ID includes a "property of the U.S. Government" disclaimer, a return address and a barcode.

Official inspectors will never ask for money or use a vehicle bearing a FEMA logo.

Please contact the local police or call the Rhode Island State Police Financial Crimes Division at 401-444-1201 if money is requested for an inspection or you believe someone is misrepresenting themselves as an inspector or a FEMA agent.

In addition, FEMA encourages anyone who believes she or he may have witnessed fraudulent activity to report it immediately through the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General's Fraud Hotline **1-800-323-8603**. Individuals reporting suspicious activity may remain anonymous.

Phony contract workers

After meeting life-sustaining needs for food, water and shelter, contracting for repairs tops the list of most needed services after a disaster. Anyone whose home or apartment suffered damages needs the services of a contractor and is eager to find one. If the home damage is plainly visible, a phony contractor may see it as an opportunity to make fast money.

Homeowners should refuse offers from contractors knocking on doors offering to make repairs. Avoid this scam by using licensed local contractors, asking for references and checking them before entering into a contract. Legitimate contractors will have more work than they can handle after a disaster.

Be sure to ask for a written estimate from at least three contractors, including labor and materials. Make sure they are insured and read the fine print.

All Rhode Islanders who have experienced damages due to the severe storms and flooding should register claims with FEMA by visiting www.FEMA.gov or calling 1-800-621-FEMA (TTY 1-800-462-7585).

FEMA leads and supports the nation in a risk-based, comprehensive emergency management system of preparedness, protection, response, recovery, and mitigation, to reduce the loss of life and property and protect the nation from all hazards including natural disasters, acts of terrorism, and other man-made disasters.

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