

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF ATTORNEY GENERAL
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Patrick C. Lynch, Attorney General

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CONSUMER ADVISORY

AG Lynch warns RI consumers to beware of scams offering help with flood damage

Attorney General Patrick C. Lynch today warned Rhode Island residents to avoid falling prey to scam artists seeking to profit from the devastation wreaked by this week's historic flooding.

"One of the first things to float up from the floodwaters are bottom feeders promising to deliver clean-up services or make home repairs but who are only intent on taking your money and running or gaining information to steal your identity," Lynch said. "My office's Consumer Protection Unit is one of our busiest units, but activity increases stratospherically whenever an event of tragic proportions occurs. The damage done by this week's flood means a correlated up tick in unscrupulous con artists who will target victims and take advantage of them in their time of need. Don't buy into it without thoroughly checking out anyone soliciting you for your business. Be especially wary of door-to-door solicitors, anyone handing out flyers, and anyone promising to speed up insurance or building permits."

Attorney General Lynch offers the following tips for avoiding being ripped off and being victimized:

- Check out a contractor before signing a contract or turning over any money. Deal only with an established, reputable, local contractor. Check references. Check with the Rhode Island Contractors Board by calling 222-1268 to ensure that the contractor is appropriately licensed and registered.
- Ask for proof of insurance. Make sure the contractor carries general liability insurance and workers' compensation. If the contractor is not insured, you may be liable for accidents occurring on your property.
- Get it in writing! Get several written estimates for a job, and get a written contract detailing the work to be done, the cost, responsibility for permits and any other promises.
- Never pay large sums in advance. Never pay in cash. Scammers will take the money and run. If you have to make a partial advance payment for materials, make the check out to the supplier and the contractor or, better yet, pay with a credit card so that you may be able to receive back a disputed amount.
- Report any incidents of price gouging to my Consumer Protection Unit. Rhode Island has a law against price gouging that goes into effect when the state declares a disaster. Price gouging, by definition, means charging high prices that are not justified, and taking unfair advantage of disaster victims.
- Beware of online schemes and charity scams. In an effort to appear "legitimate" or to pose as a local contractor, con artists may set up websites. Other sites may ask for money to help flood victims, with the money going into their own pockets, rather than assisting flood victims.
- Talk to your insurance company, read your insurance policy, and contact our Consumer Protection Unit with any suspicions, problems, or for help and advice.

Lynch's Consumer Protection Unit can be reached by phoning 274-4400, pressing "1" at the first prompt for English and "3" for Spanish, and then pressing "1" at the second prompt.