

# Beware of Those Trying to Take Advantage of WVa Disaster Survivors

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**Charleston, W.Va.** – Disasters attract a few trying to help themselves rather than those who suffered losses. Precautions can help those affected by the severe storms, flooding, landslides and mudslides of July 28-29, 2017 avoid being victimized.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) never charges for any of its disaster recovery services, nor does it endorse any commercial businesses, products or services.

West Virginia has a price gouging law that forbids businesses and contractors from raising their prices more than 10 percent above pre-disaster levels. It is enforced by the state's Attorney General.

State and FEMA officials offer these consumer tips:

- When hiring a contractor, ask for proof that the contractor has current general liability insurance and workers' compensation insurance. Ask for references and check them before signing a contract.
- Don't pay in advance for more than half the repair costs. Don't make the final payment until you are satisfied with the completed work.
- Verify solicitations for disaster relief agencies by asking for the charity's exact name, street address, phone number and web address. Phone the charity directly and confirm that the person asking for funds is an employee or an authorized volunteer. Request a receipt.

Also:

- FEMA and the U. S. Small Business Administration deal only with the homeowner or renter, not with an intermediary.
- State and federal workers do not solicit or accept money from applicants for disaster assistance.



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- **FEMA inspectors** present photo identification. They are assigned to specific properties and have the applicant's nine-digit FEMA registration number. They make appointments to meet the applicant at the property. A FEMA inspector's job is to verify the extent of eligible disaster-related damage. They don't seek banking or other personal information, nor do they recommend contractors.

If you suspect fraud, call the FEMA Disaster Fraud Hotline at **866-720-5721**. If you are the victim of a home repair scam or price gouging, call the Office of the West Virginia Attorney General at **800-368-8808**.

For updates on the West Virginia response and recovery, follow the West Virginia Department of Emergency Management at [www.dhsem.wv.gov](http://www.dhsem.wv.gov) on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/WVDHSEM>, and Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/WVDHSEM>. Also see <https://twitter.com/ReadyWV> and West Virginia Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters at <https://wvvoad.communityos.org/cms/home>. Additional FEMA updates on this West Virginia disaster are available at <https://www.fema.gov/disaster/4331>.

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*Disaster recovery assistance is available without regard to race, color, religion, nationality, sex, age, disability, English proficiency or economic status. If you or someone you know has been discriminated against, call FEMA toll-free at 800-621-FEMA (3362). For TTY call 800-462-7585.*

*FEMA's mission is to support our citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards. Follow us on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/femaregion3> and the FEMA Blog at <http://blog.fema.gov>.*

*The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) is the federal government's primary source of money for the long-term rebuilding of disaster-damaged private property. SBA helps homeowners, renters, businesses of all sizes, and private non-profit organizations fund repairs or rebuilding efforts and cover the cost of replacing lost or disaster-damaged personal property. These disaster loans cover losses not fully compensated by insurance or other recoveries and do not duplicate benefits of other agencies or organizations. For more information, applicants may contact SBA's Disaster Assistance Customer Service Center by*



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calling (800) 659-2955, emailing [disastercustomerservice@sba.gov](mailto:disastercustomerservice@sba.gov), or visiting SBA's Web site at [www.sba.gov/disaster](http://www.sba.gov/disaster). Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals may call (800) 877-8339.



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