

Beware of Scams and Fraudulent Phone Calls

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SACRAMENTO – State and federal recovery officials urge California residents to watch for and report any suspicious activity or potential fraud from scam artists, identity thieves and other criminals who may try to prey on vulnerable survivors of the October wildfires.

Common post-disaster fraud practices include:

- **Fake offers of state or federal aid:**

- Beware if anyone claiming to be from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) or the state visits, calls or emails asking for an applicant's Social Security number, bank account number or other sensitive information.
- Avoid scam artists who promise a disaster grant and ask for cash deposits or advance payments in full.
- Know that federal workers do not solicit or accept money. FEMA and the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) staff never charge applicants for disaster assistance, inspections or help in filling out applications. Do not give out information and report people claiming to be government workers to local police.
- Provide your Social Security number and banking information only when registering for FEMA assistance, either by calling 800-621-3362, TTY 800-462-7585, or going online at www.DisasterAssistance.gov or the smart phone FEMA App. If you use 711-Relay or Video Relay Services, call 800-621-3362. Operators are multilingual and calls are answered from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. seven days a week.

- **Phony housing inspectors:** Owners/applicants may be especially vulnerable to phony housing inspectors claiming to represent FEMA or SBA. An applicant should always:



- Ask to see the inspector's identification badge. All federal employees and contractors carry official, laminated photo identification.
- Inspectors also have each applicant's nine-digit registration number.
- FEMA inspectors never require banking information.

It is important to note that FEMA housing inspectors verify damage, but do not hire or endorse specific contractors to fix homes or recommend repairs. They do not determine your eligibility for assistance.

- **Fraudulent building contractors:** When hiring a contractor, be sure to:
 - Use licensed local contractors backed by reliable references.
 - Demand that contractors carry general liability insurance and worker's compensation.
- **Bogus pleas for post-disaster donations:** Unscrupulous solicitors may play on the sympathy for disaster survivors. Disaster aid solicitations may arrive by phone, email, letter or face-to-face visits. Verify legitimate solicitation:
 - Ask for the charity's exact name, street address, phone number, and Web address, then call the charity directly and confirm that the person asking for funds is an employee or volunteer.
 - Don't pay with cash.
 - Request a receipt with the charity's name, street address, phone number and Web address (if applicable).

Anyone with knowledge of fraud, waste or abuse may call the FEMA Disaster Fraud Hotline at 866-720-5721 or report it to the Federal Trade Commission at www.ftccompliantassistant.gov

You may also send an email to DHSOIGHotline@dhs.gov

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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.

The SBA is the federal government's primary source of money for the long-term rebuilding of disaster-damaged private property. SBA helps businesses of all sizes, private nonprofit organizations, homeowners and renters 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 calling 800-659-2955, emailing disastercustomerservice@sba.gov, or visiting SBA's website at www.sba.gov/disaster. Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals may call 800-877-8339.

