

# West Virginia: Registration for FEMA assistance has ended. Beware of fraud and scams.

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**CHARLESTON, W.Va.** – After a disaster, scam artists, identity thieves and other criminals may attempt to take advantage of disaster survivors. Federal and state emergency management officials urge residents to watch for and report any suspicious activity. In West Virginia, the registration period for residents who suffered damage due to late February flooding ended on July 19, 2021. Beware of anyone offering to register you for FEMA assistance after that date.

When a disaster strikes, dishonest people and scam artists may try to take advantage of survivors by posing as FEMA representatives or other official disaster aid workers. They may even pose as relatives “just trying to help” survivors complete their applications when they are only interested in using a survivor for their own benefit.

Some so-called contractors make promises they don’t keep and do shoddy work or no work at all while pocketing a survivor’s money.

Jeff Jones, FEMA Federal Coordinating Officer, warns residents to be vigilant. “FEMA inspectors won’t ask for money. They have a process for verifying your registration number,” he said. “If you have doubts about a caller, hang up and call 800-621-FEMA (3362) and report it. Plus, you can always contact your local emergency manager or the West Virginia Emergency Management Division.”

## **People Claiming to Represent FEMA**

- You may receive phone calls or unexpected visits to your home from people claiming to be FEMA housing inspectors or people claiming they work for FEMA. The person might ask for your Social Security number and income or banking information. **FEMA representatives will have a laminated badge and your FEMA registration number.**



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- Protect the privacy of your nine-digit FEMA case/registration number. Legitimate FEMA housing inspectors will only ask for **the last four digits** as part of the verification process; the inspector will complete the process by providing the applicant with the first four digits of the registration ID.
- Don't give your banking information to a person claiming to be a FEMA housing inspector. FEMA inspectors are never authorized to collect your personal financial information.

### **Fake Offers of Local or Federal Aid**

- Don't trust anyone who asks for money to help you obtain assistance. Federal and local disaster workers do not ask for or accept money. FEMA and U.S. Small Business Administration representatives never charge applicants for disaster assistance, inspections or help in filling out applications.
- Don't believe anyone who promises a disaster grant in return for a large cash deposit or other payments in full.

### **Fraudulent Building Contractors**

- Use licensed or verified local contractors with reliable references.
- To find licensed, certified West Virginia contractors, check the West Virginia Division of Labor page at [https://labor.wv.gov/licensing/contractor\\_license](https://labor.wv.gov/licensing/contractor_license).
- Don't pay more than half the costs of repairs in advance.
- Demand that contractors detail the job you expect them to do and ask them to give you a written estimate.

**Fraudulent charitable solicitations.** Criminals exploit survivors by sending fake communications through email or social media and by creating phony websites designed to solicit contributions. For a list of reputable charities that are approved by the Better Business Bureau's Wise Giving Alliance, go to [Give.org](https://www.bbb.org/give).

The Alliance advises "do not respond to unsolicited emails, watch out for pushy telemarketers and look out for fake charities that sound real by using similar names." For more information about avoiding charitable giving scams, visit the Federal Trade Commission's website at [www.consumer.ftc.gov/features/scam-alerts](https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/features/scam-alerts).



**Report the Scam.** Reporting helps protect others. While agencies can't always track down the scammer, they can use the information gathered to record patterns of abuse. And those patterns may lead to action being taken against a company or industry.

Based on the type of scam you may see, contact the appropriate agency.

- If you believe you or a loved one has become a victim of a scam or identity theft, report it immediately to your local police or sheriff's department, or contact the office of the West Virginia Attorney General at 304-558-8986.
- You are encouraged to report scams to your local police department or sheriff's office, especially if you lost money or property or believe someone stole your identity.
- If you suspect fraud of any kind related to disaster assistance or have knowledge of fraud, waste or abuse, you can report these tips - 24 hours a day, seven days a week - to the FEMA Disaster Fraud Hotline at 866-720-5721. Or, email [disaster@leo.gov](mailto:disaster@leo.gov).
- If someone is using your personal information to open new accounts, make purchase or get a tax refund, report it at [IdentityTheft.gov](https://www.identitytheft.gov).
- You can file a complaint with West Virginia Attorney General Consumer Protection and Anti-Trust Division if you have been scammed or have a dispute with a business regarding a transaction. Call 304-558-8986.
- Reporting to the Better Business Bureau Scam Tracker can help others become aware of scams in your local area.

For more information on West Virginia's disaster recovery, visit [www.fema.gov/disaster/4605](https://www.fema.gov/disaster/4605). Learn more about Disaster Assistance at [www.disasterassistance.gov](https://www.disasterassistance.gov). For guidance about the Disaster Assistance application process, visit [www.fema.gov/assistance/individual/program#apply](https://www.fema.gov/assistance/individual/program#apply).

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*FEMA's mission is helping people before, during, and after disasters.*



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