

# Tips for Storm Survivors to Avoid Contractor Fraud

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**NASHVILLE, Tenn.** – With many residents in Middle Tennessee repairing and rebuilding their properties after damage from the August storms and flooding, federal and state recovery officials encourage those hiring a contractor to be aware of fraud. Disasters bring out fraudsters and con artists, many of whom claim to be affiliated with FEMA when they're not. FEMA does not certify contractors.

## Other tips to keep in mind when hiring a contractor:

- **Do your research.** Scam artists will usually come to you to offer their services — either at your door, on the phone or through email — so be especially wary of solicitors.
  - **Don't offer personal financial information over the phone.** Know who you are dealing with and always ask for identification.
  - **Get estimates from multiple contractors** and your insurance company. Reject any offer that seems too good to be true.
  - **Ask for references from past customers.**
  - **Use the Better Business Bureau, [www.bbb.org](http://www.bbb.org), and internet search engines.** Fraudulent firms change names frequently, so search the web for their address and phone number, and include terms like “review,” “scam” and “complaint”.
  - **Verify insurance.** Contractors should have disability and workers' compensation insurance. If they don't, you may be liable for accidents on your property.
  - **Make sure contractors have the proper licensing** and are bonded.
  - **Ensure contractors obtain the necessary permits** to do the job.
  - **Demand satisfaction.** Don't sign completion papers or make final payment until the work is done correctly.
- **Don't wire money or use reloadable debit or gift cards.** There is no legitimate reason to use this form of payment.



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- **Get agreements in writing.** Read the contract carefully, and if you don't understand every word, take it to an expert. Never sign a contract with blank spaces to be filled in.
  - Make sure the contract details all work to be performed, the costs, projected completion date and how to negotiate changes and settle disputes.
- **Take a picture** of your contractor, their vehicle and license plate and/or the contractor's business card and driver's license.
- **Report your concerns.** Potential fraud should be reported to your local law enforcement agency. You can also visit the Tennessee Dept. of Commerce and Insurance and file an online complaint form [File a Complaint \(tn.gov\)](https://www.tn.gov/file-a-complaint) or call the free **FEMA Disaster Fraud Hotline at 866-720-5721** available 24-hours a day.

For more information on Tennessee's disaster recovery, visit [www.tn.gov/tema.html](https://www.tn.gov/tema.html) and [www.fema.gov/disaster/4609](https://www.fema.gov/disaster/4609). You may also follow FEMA on [www.facebook.com/fema](https://www.facebook.com/fema) and Twitter [@FEMARegion4](https://twitter.com/FEMARegion4).



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