



Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security

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Watch Out For Scam Artists, Price Gouging

Grand Traverse Emergency Management and Homeland Security is asking citizens to watch out for scam artists and price gouging while they recover from last week's severe thunderstorms.

Residents should be cautious of door-to-door solicitors who hand out flyers and promise to speed up the insurance or contracting process, including those who ask for large cash deposits or advance payments in full. Scam artists are often transients who will move quickly into a troubled area, target those perceived as vulnerable or in need of assistance and leave town without fulfilling services.

"When contracting services after a disaster, you need to be cautious not to be taken advantage of by scam artists," said Gregg Bird, Grand Traverse County Emergency Management Coordinator. "Unfortunately, natural disasters often bring out con artists, scammers and those looking to make a quick dollar by taking advantage of disaster survivors and others willing to help."

Consider the following when hiring a contractor after a disaster:

- Ask to see state or local permits or licenses. Go to www.michigan.gov/bcclicense and www.michigan.gov/statelicensesearch to verify state license information.
- Hire known and recommended repair companies.
- Get at least three estimates from different companies.
- Get all agreements in writing that state exactly what work will be done.
- Make a full payment only when terms of the contract are met.

When contracting a tree service, also consider the following:

- Debris drop-off sites are FREE for Grand Traverse County residents. There should be no tipping fees associated with service when disposing debris at designated county sites.
- Tree services may quote thousands of dollars for removing "root balls," which are stumps tipped over and full of root soil. If possible, ask the tree service to move the "root ball" back into the ground and grind down the stump for cost savings.
- Always receive multiple quotes to find the best price.

Citizens are also encouraged to be careful when being solicited for services by phone or email. If the deal being offered is too good to be true, it is probably fraudulent.

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Price Gouging

Under the Michigan Consumer Protection Act, a retailer may not charge a price that is "grossly in excess of the price at which similar property or services are sold." Consumers should be aware of prices and report any business that appears to be charging grossly excessive prices.

If consumers are concerned that a business may be engaging in behavior that violates the Consumer Protection Act, they are encouraged to contact the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division at 1-877-765-8388 or file an online complaint at www.michigan.gov/agcomplaints.

About the Disaster

Gov. Rick Snyder declared a "state of disaster" on Aug. 10 for Grand Traverse County. By declaring a "state of disaster," the state of Michigan has made available all state resources in cooperation with local response and recovery efforts in the disaster area.

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