

Preventing Fraud

Price gouging

- ◆ Be alert for price gouging. If you believe that you are a victim of price gouging after a disaster, report the incident to the consumer hotline at the Office of the Attorney General at 800-252-8011.

Home repair

- ◆ After a disaster, many people go door-to-door offering to do repair work. Some may be honest, but some may take your money without completing the job or use inferior materials and do shoddy work. Before hiring a contractor, ask for references and proof of insurance. Check with the references to make sure the person does good-quality work and is dependable.
- ◆ Get written estimates from more than one contractor. The estimate should include a complete description of the work to be done, time schedules, and payment schedules.
- ◆ Read and understand all contracts you sign. Keep copies of everything you sign. Any contract you sign for work on your home-stead must contain the following warning next to the space for your signature:

"Important notice: You and your contractor are responsible for meeting the terms and conditions of this contract. If you sign this contract and you fail to meet the terms and conditions of this contract, you may lose your legal ownership rights in your home. KNOW YOUR RIGHTS AND DUTIES UNDER THE LAW."

- ◆ Never sign a contract that has blanks.
- ◆ Never pay a contractor in full or sign a completion certificate until the work is finished and acceptable. Never hire someone who says he or she must be paid in full before the work is complete.

Identity theft

- ◆ After a disaster you will need to share personal information to get relief benefits from government agencies or other organizations, or to get replacement identification documents. Be cautious. Identity thieves may pose as government officials or agency representatives. Ask them for identification, and verify it.
- ◆ Keep an eye on your bank statements, credit card statements, and other statements to watch for unauthorized purchases or withdrawals.
- ◆ About 60 days after the disaster, request copies of your credit report from all three major credit bureaus—Experian, TransUnion and Equifax.
- ◆ If you believe someone has stolen your identity, report it immediately to your bank, credit card company and local law enforcement. You might want to add an Initial Security Alert to your personal credit report. This alert, which remains on your report for 90 days, notifies anyone who reviews your report to take extra steps to verify your identity before granting credit. You need to request the security alert with only one credit bureau. It will automatically notify the other two to place an alert on your file.

