

Hurricane Irma Devastation Prompts Home Improvement Scams

Wednesday, September 13, 2017

Hurricane Irma has left many Southwest Florida homeowners with leaky roofs, water intrusion, downed trees and crumbling infrastructure. Sadly, it has also brought scam artists to our area.

Before donating to any charity make sure it is legit. You can check out many charities by going to www.charitynavigator.org, www.give.org, or www.charitywatch.org. Scammers are going door to door, creating bogus GoFundMe accounts and taking to social media to ask for donations and assistance.

Before you give do some homework. Many of us want to give and want to help our neighbors and the scammers and thieves know this and are more than willing to prey on our emotions during this stressful time.

The Lee County Sheriff's Office realizes you want your problems resolved as quickly as possible so you can regain a sense of normalcy. However, the temptation to rush into repairs without first doing your homework can leave you vulnerable to fly-by-night contractors looking to make a quick buck by way of home improvement scams. Fortunately, you can avoid being left with an empty wallet and unfinished repair work by following these tips that will help you steer clear of a shameless scammer:

- Avoid door-to-door solicitations at all costs. Hiring someone who randomly provides an unsolicited offer is a disaster waiting to happen. Many of these scammers have little to no experience in home repair, use high-pressure sales tactics, quote too good to be true prices and ask for payment upfront.
- Find a reputable contractor using referrals from friends, neighbors, and co-workers. 1) Check for complaints with the Better Business Bureau, 2) Contact the DBPR (Division of Business and Professional Regulation) to verify professional licensing, 3) Confirm they have a business tax receipt with your county or city tax department, 4) Check the Division of Workers' Compensation for proof of coverage, and 5) Ask for proof of general liability insurance.
- Insist on a written contract detailing the work to be done, terms of service, etc.
- Never pay in full before the work is finished, especially when paying with cash.

To confirm if someone is a licensed contractor contact the DBPR online at www.myfloridalicense.com. To report suspected unlicensed activity, call the Unlicensed Activity Hotline at 866-532-1440.

