



GEMA



FEMA

News Release

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BEWARE OF CONTRACTOR FRAUD IN WAKE OF MAY TORNADOES

ATLANTA – Georgians who are planning to rebuild after the severe storms and tornadoes of May 11-12 that ravaged the state will likely need contractors to help them repair disaster damages or rebuild their homes and businesses.

When it comes to choosing professional construction help, state and federal disaster recovery officials are urging citizens to be smart consumers – aware that there are some scam artists who perpetrate fraud upon unwary and dazed storm victims.

To help the process go smoothly, recovery officials are offering the following suggestions:

- **Use local contractors first.** If you were satisfied with past work done by local licensed contractors, try them first. If they cannot help you, ask for recommendations. If you must hire a contractor you don't know, talk to several of them before signing anything.
- **Ask for references.** Contractors should be willing to provide names of previous customers. Contact some of those customers and ask if they would hire the contractor again.
- **Ask for a written estimate.** Make sure it includes everything you expect the contractor to do. Also, find out up-front if the contractor will charge a fee for that estimate.
- **Ask for proof of insurance.** Be sure the contractor has disability and workers' compensation insurance. If not, you may be liable for accidents on your property.
- **Get a written contract.** The contract should clearly state all work, costs and the payment schedule. Never sign a blank contract or one with blank spaces. It may also be worthwhile to have an attorney look at the contract before signing it.
- **Ask for guarantees in writing (if separate from the contract).** If the contractor provides guarantees, he/she should clearly state what is covered by that guarantee, who is responsible for fulfilling the guarantee (dealer, contractor or manufacturer), and how long the guarantee is valid.

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- **Get a copy of the final, signed contract.** Read it over carefully before signing. Once signed, the contract is binding on both you and the contractor.
- **Do not sign off before the job is finished.** Make sure the work is done to your satisfaction before signing completion papers or making a final payment. A reputable contractor will not threaten you or pressure you to sign if the job is not finished properly.

Check references, obtain written estimates and avoid large cash payments up front. Check with the Governor's Office of Consumer Affairs, your area's Better Business Bureau and other appropriate local and state agencies. The Governor's Office of Consumer Affairs can be reached at: **1-800-869-1123 or 404-651-8600.**

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) does not endorse specific contractors.

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FEMA coordinates the federal government's role in preparing for, preventing, mitigating the effects of, responding to, and recovering from all domestic disasters, whether natural or man-made, including acts of terror.

Disaster recovery assistance is available without regard to race, color, religion, nationality, sex, age, disability, English proficiency or economic status. If you or someone you know has been discriminated against, call FEMA toll-free at 800-621-FEMA (3362). For TTY call 800-462-7585.

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For more information on Georgia's disaster recovery, visit www.fema.gov or www.gema.ga.gov or www.ready.ga.gov/ or www.georgia911.org or www.afcema.com