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Disaster News

DON'T BE A VICTIM TWICE

Be Aware of Possible Frauds or Scams

PASADENA, Calif. – In the wake of the devastating California fires, those who have suffered damages and losses may be visited or called by someone claiming to be an official disaster aid worker or inspector.

State and federal officials caution residents to check the identification of anyone wanting to enter their home or property and to watch out for scams and fraud that may surface.

“FEMA is dedicated to helping those affected by these life-changing fires rebuild their lives,” said Federal Coordinating Officer Mike Hall of FEMA. “It is shameful that some would choose to take advantage of disaster victims during a time when so many are offering their generosity to those who have suffered.”

“The Governor, the Attorney General and other state officials have made it clear that fraud and other attempts to take advantage of fire survivors will not be tolerated,” said State Coordinating Officer Henry Renteria of the Governor’s Office of Emergency Services (OES). “I urge those who have been affected by the fires to err on the side of caution.”

It is important that residents carefully check the photo identification of FEMA inspectors, U.S. Small Business Administration loss verifiers, and insurance adjusters who may be visiting their homes. All inspectors are required to carry a photo ID. Residents who have questions concerning the authenticity of a credential should contact their local law enforcement officials.

California residents need to be aware of some common ploys, such as phone calls from people claiming to be with FEMA and asking for personal information. **Never casually give out any personal information over the phone.** If you have any doubts about the caller, call them back to make verification.

Those beginning the rebuilding process can get tips on hiring contractors and how to avoid contractor fraud by going online at www.cslb.ca.gov. You can also check to see if a contractor is licensed at the same online address or by calling 1-800-321-2752.

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Page 2 of 2 - DON'T BE A VICTIM TWICE

FEMA encourages anyone who believes she or he may have witnessed fraudulent activity to report it immediately through the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General's hotline: **1-800-323-8603** or the California Consumer Protection hotline: **1-800-952-5210**.

Another helpful information resource for those rebuilding their lives is online at www.rebuildyourlife.ca.gov.

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.

The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES) coordinates overall state-agency response to major disasters in support of local government. OES is also responsible for maintaining the State Emergency Plan and coordinating the California's preparedness, mitigation and recovery efforts.

Disaster recovery assistance is available without regard to race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, economic status or retaliation. If you or someone you know has been discriminated against, you should call FEMA toll-free at 1-800-621-FEMA (3362) or contact your State Office of Equal rights. If suspicious of any abuse of FEMA programs, please contact the fraud hotline at 1-800-323-8603.

Temporary housing assistance from FEMA does not require that an applicant file for an SBA loan. However, an applicant must complete an SBA loan application to be eligible for additional assistance under the part of the Other Needs Assistance (ONA) program that covers personal property, vehicle repair or replacement, and moving and storage expenses. There are other ONA grants such as public transportation expenses, medical and dental expenses, and funeral and burial expenses that do not require individuals to apply for an SBA loan to be eligible. FEMA will process applications for housing assistance regardless of whether the applicant has applied for an SBA loan, and eligibility determinations for applicants requesting FEMA's temporary housing assistance will not be held up because the applicant has or has not filled out an SBA application.

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