



News Release

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Disaster Survivors Urged to Beware of Recovery Scams

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Small Business Administration is urging disaster victims seeking federal aid to be alert to scam artists posing as federal officials and to be cautious about any solicitations for fees to perform services that are available from federal agency staff for free.

In the wake of widespread flooding, wildfires and tornados in many areas across the country over the past few months, the SBA is particularly concerned about flyers that have appeared in tornado-damaged areas asking for non-refundable fees of up to \$450 to help disaster victims fill out their loan applications and as much as \$1,000 to verify losses and file loan applications.

Federal agencies involved in disaster recovery will never ask for a fee or payment to file an application for financial assistance or to inspect damaged property.

“Historically, natural disasters bring out the very best in people, and there are countless stories of the selfless acts of helpful neighbors and volunteers,” said SBA Administrator Karen Mills. “Unfortunately, we have also seen in the past individuals who attempt to take advantage of people who need assistance. Disaster survivors should be vigilant in protecting their personal assets, particularly in the stressful environment of a disaster recovery.

“The SBA will not tolerate the defrauding of those who have already lost so much in the aftermath of these devastating disasters,” Mills said. “Those who are found taking advantage of disaster victims will be prosecuted to the fullest extent provided by law.”

If you suspect a person is posing as a local or federal agent, or encounter what you believe are fraudulent activities connected with disaster relief operations, contact your local law enforcement officials, phone the toll-free National Disaster Fraud Hotline at 866-720-5721, or send an email to disaster@leo.gov. The phone line is staffed by a live operator 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

To register for federal help after a disaster declaration, visit www.DisasterAssistance.gov, or call FEMA at 800-621-3362 (800-426-7585 for the speech or hearing impaired).

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Disaster survivors may also visit one of the local recovery centers to get help with filing for assistance. To get help with the disaster loan application, contact the SBA by email at disastercustomerservice@sba.gov, or by calling 800-659-2955 (800-877-8339 for those with speech or hearing disabilities). Those affected by recent disasters may also file a loan application online by visiting SBA's secure website at <https://disasterloan.sba.gov/ela/>.

The SBA makes low-interest, taxpayer-backed disaster loans to homeowners, renters, businesses and non-profit organizations of all sizes. More information about the disaster assistance program is available at www.sba.gov/disasterassistance.

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