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September 22, 2008

### **Texans Should Be Alert To Clean-Up, Repair Services Scams in Wake of Hurricane Ike**

Texans whose homes sustained damage during Hurricane Ike should avoid scam artists posing as contractors willing to perform residential repairs. To protect their pocket books, homeowners can take steps to avoid falling victim to these scams.

As with any home repair work, homeowners may be asked to pay a portion of the repair costs as a down-payment; however, homeowners should NEVER pay the entire repair cost in advance. Damaged homes can be easily noticed by scam artists posing as contractors and marketing their “services” with door-to-door solicitations. Texans should be cautious if unsolicited salespeople knock on their doors. Businesses that perform specialized home repairs seldom walk neighborhoods to find business. If Texans are being pressured into making a quick decision to hire the contractor to do work, they should say NO. Legitimate businesspeople know that customers need time to check out the business and will welcome customers’ questions.

When choosing a contractor to repair damaged homes, Texans should choose contractors with physical addresses – instead of only cell phone numbers – to help ensure they are legitimate. A physical address could help customers locate the contractor if problems arise with the repairs. Once a contractor has been chosen to perform repair work, Texans should read the legally-binding contract carefully before signing it. Customers should not sign any contracts that have blanks – those blanks could later be filled in with unfavorable terms for the homeowner.

Texans should keep written records and receipts of any transaction they believe violates the special legal protections that apply during a declared disaster. If speaking directly with the service provider does not resolve the dispute, Texans should call the Office of the Attorney General's toll-free Consumer Complaint Hotline at (800) 252-8011. Hotline staff is available between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. If Internet service is available, consumers may file a written complaint online at [www.texasattorneygeneral.gov](http://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov).

A disaster declaration triggers heightened enforcement authority for the Office of the Attorney General under the Texas Deceptive Trade Practices Act. This authority protects Texans by prohibiting exorbitant prices for necessities, such as drinking water, food, batteries and generators.

Posted by KTRK on September 22, 2008 in [Ike](#) | [Permalink](#)

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