



Avoid Falling for Scams after Disasters

By John D. Doak, Oklahoma Insurance Commissioner

Ready or not, severe weather season is here. While you may be prepared for severe storms, wildfires and earthquakes, you may not be ready for the scammers that seem to surface right after Oklahoma's natural disasters. It's unfortunate that there are people out there trying to cheat others out of their hard-earned money under the guise of providing a service after a disaster. Yet, it happens time and time again to unsuspecting homeowners.

There are ways to prevent this from happening to you and your family. Become an informed homeowner. Above all, take time to make the right decision for your family and seek advice from a trusted professional before signing anything.

Here are some basic guidelines for hiring service providers:

Roofers and Builders

- Do not rush into signing a contract with any company. Take time to collect information and get written estimates for any repair work.
- Make temporary repairs to your property to prevent further losses from the elements and to secure your property, remembering to keep all receipts. Avoid hiring a contractor to make any temporary repairs, as temporary repairs should be covered as part of the total settlement. If you pay for a temporary repair job, you may not have enough money for permanent repairs.
- Take time to investigate the track record of any roofer, builder or contractor that you consider hiring. This includes researching the reputation of the company in your community, calling the Better Business Bureau and getting references before ever handing over a deposit.
- Always pay upon completion of the job. Often, a fraudster will convince homeowners to lay down a large deposit to commence repair work. In these cases, the job is rarely ever completed with the con artist never seen from again.

Public Adjusters and Attorneys

- Door-to-door solicitors are especially ones to be wary of in the aftermath of a disaster. You should never be scared into making a decision or signing a contract

on the spot. As with anyone you are looking to hire, take your time to research the credibility of the person seeking to handle your claim. A worst-case scenario could involve forfeiting a significant portion of your insurance dollars.

- Try to settle your claim directly with your insurance company. Your insurer provides an adjuster at no charge to you. You always have the option of hiring a third-party professional if needed.
- Public adjusters generally cost up to 20 percent of your total claim settlement and an attorney as much as 30 percent or more.

A contract for repair should always include a separate breakout of labor and materials costs, the date the project is to begin, the date it is to be completed and proof of insurance coverage during that entire time. The contract should also include the amount of payment required along the way, with the final payment due AFTER the work has been completed to your satisfaction.

For more information or help with any other insurance questions, please contact the Oklahoma Insurance Department Consumer Assistance Division at 1-800-522-0071 or by visiting www.ok.gov/oid.