

Be Wary of Scammers Attracted by the Flint Water Crisis

CONSUMER ALERT

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ATTORNEY GENERAL**

The Attorney General provides Consumer Alerts to inform the public of unfair, misleading, or deceptive business practices, and to provide information and guidance on other issues of concern. Consumer Alerts are not legal advice, legal authority, or a binding legal opinion from the Department of Attorney General.

During the Flint Water Crisis Be Wary of Scammers

Disasters take an emotional, physical, and often a financial toll on all affected. Whatever the type of disaster – homeowners and consumers want to repair the damage and feel better right away to get back to a sense of normalcy. They need quick answers and quick solutions. Unfortunately, such situations invite unscrupulous scammers seeking to take advantage of otherwise careful consumers.

To avoid falling victim to con artists, make sure you take the following steps:

- Don't make any rash decisions. Do your homework and check out any contractor before you pay them anything or sign any contracts. This is especially true if you are approached by anyone telling you they can fix your water lines right away – but only if you accept their “help” right now. Legitimate home repair contractors and other service providers understand that you need time to do your homework.
- Keep Your Guard Up. Ask to see the ID of anyone who wants to enter your home or business and check them out with the governmental authority or the company they claim to be from. Avoid giving out your personal information. Some scam artists masquerade as safety inspectors or utility workers who say immediate work is required. City, state, and federal inspectors may verify damages, but they do not involve themselves in any aspect of the repair nor recommend or certify any contractor. Nor do they solicit or accept money.
- Beware of door-to-door solicitors. Reputable professionals in the industry rarely solicit door to door. And, be especially wary of anyone who approaches you unsolicited and asks you to pay cash for their services or says they can perform your repairs at a discount with leftover supplies from another job.
- Do not let anyone remove your water meter, and do not pay anyone for alternative water services. Under Flint City Code of Ordinances, unauthorized

parties who tamper with city water system equipment may be guilty of a misdemeanor.

- Check the company's complaint history by calling the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division (toll free) at 877-765-8388, and contacting the Better Business Bureau.
- Check the [Michigan Attorney General's Building and Remodeling Advice for Homeowners Consumer Alert](#) for additional information and advice on choosing a building contractor or company for home remodeling and repair is available.

Don't be Fooled by Water Charity Scams

Michiganders are very generous when a disaster strikes fellow citizens. They see it as an opportunity to help fellow human beings by relieving their suffering.

Unfortunately, scam artists see these tragedies as opportunities to enrich themselves. These scammers exploit the sympathy of donors - perhaps with a name sounding both compassionate and legitimate or with a heart-wrenching appeal - to steal the donations or fraudulently to obtain consumers' sensitive financial information.

You can avoid disaster scams and still make a positive contribution to relief and rebuilding projects. Here are some suggestions:

- Be cautious of requests for donations by unfamiliar organizations, which may be nothing more than tricks by identity thieves to collect your personal information. It's generally better to contact a charity directly to ensure its true identity.
- Before donating, search the [Attorney General's website](#) to see if the organization is registered to solicit in Michigan. (Be aware that some legitimate charities, including the American Red Cross and Salvation Army, do not appear in the Attorney General's database because they are exempt. Call the Attorney General's Charitable Trust Section at 800-769-4515 if you have questions.) You'll also find important financial information regarding how the charity spends its money. Other sites with publicly available financial information for charities are the [National Center for Charitable Statistics](#) or [Guidestar](#).
- Beware of unsolicited text and email appeals on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Some leading relief charities, such as Catholic Relief Services and the American Red Cross, now accept donations via cell phone. But unsolicited text and email messages, like unsolicited telephone calls, should be viewed with suspicion and handled with caution.
- Choose established charitable organizations that have a history of helping in disasters. The American Red Cross, United Way of America, Catholic Relief Services, and the Salvation Army are just a few among many charities that either give immediate relief or assist in rebuilding communities.

- Crowdfunding is simply another way to ask people for money. As with any other way of soliciting donations, there will always be scammers trying to exploit the generosity of donors. Thus, the cardinal rule for all charitable giving remains—donor beware. For more information, read the [Attorney General's Crowdfunding for Donations Consumer Alert](#).
- Check the state's [Taking Action on Flint Water](#) webpage for additional information and advice.

For More Information Contact:

[Consumer Protection Division](#)

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