



U. S. Department of Justice

Jason R. Coody
United States Attorney
Northern District of Florida

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday, October 7, 2022

United States Attorney's Office
Northern District of Florida
(850) 216-3845
libby.lastinger@usdoj.gov
Follow us on Twitter @NDFLnews

National Center for Disaster Fraud Warns of Fraud After Hurricane Ian

TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA – In the wake of extreme devastation caused by Hurricane Ian, the National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) today issued a reminder that as with any major disaster, there are unscrupulous thieves who seek to take advantage of the environment to line their own pockets.

“Fraudsters targeting individuals who are already suffering from the impact of Hurricane Ian is despicable and an inexcusable crime,” said U.S. Attorney Ronald C. Gathe, Jr., who serves as the Executive Director of the NCDF. “We are still in hurricane season, and it is important for people to be on the lookout for fraudsters who seek to profit from natural disasters through identity theft schemes and solicitations for fake charities. This is especially true for the citizens of Florida, South Carolina, and other states impacted by Ian. The Department of Justice, through U.S. Attorney Offices across all states and territories of the United States, are committed to detecting this type of fraud and will aggressively prosecute the offenders.”

“We do not tolerate fraud,” said United States Attorney Jason R. Coody, of the Northern District of Florida. “Individuals, families, and businesses have suffered, and will continue to suffer, tremendous losses. Dozens of agencies, investigators, and prosecutors are ready to respond to credible allegations of fraud and abuse, and we will continue to prosecute those who attempt to prey on the good people of Florida. If you are aware of fraud, I urge you to call the National Disaster Fraud Hotline.”

The NCDF, a national coordinating agency, was created by a partnership between the Department of Justice and various law enforcement and regulatory agencies. Its goal is to improve and further the detection, prevention, investigation, and prosecution of fraud related to natural and man-made disasters, and to advocate for the victims of such fraud.

Historically, the NCDF has echoed federal, state, and local law enforcement messaging designed to assist individuals to avoid becoming the victim of crimes related to disaster fraud. This messaging has included warnings regarding electronic (email, internet, phone/robocall, social media, etc.) communications designed to obtain information and money from individuals affected by disasters. These communications are frequently disseminated prior to a disaster striking (e.g.,

targeting individuals in the potential path of hurricanes and wildfires) or immediately after disaster strikes (now for victims of Ian).

In the wake of Hurricane Ian, there is no indication that criminals will slow down their efforts to commit fraud on individuals already victimized by the storm. The following examples of disaster-related fraud are based on over 200,000 historical complaints submitted to the NCDF:

- Fake charities immediately soliciting donations using the names of well-known charities or appearing reasonable as related to a disaster
- Individuals impersonating government officials and insurance company representatives advising that disaster assistance will be made available should the potential victim provide a sum of money or personal identifiers such as date of birth, social security number, and bank account information (name of financial institution, routing number, and account number)
- Individuals soliciting victims to invest in non-existent businesses and ventures offering recovery efforts such as cleanup, rebuilding, and making structures, such as homes, more resistant to future disasters by elevating structures to minimize future flood risks
- Individuals overcharging for goods and services needed by victims of disaster, also known as price-gouging

In addition, based on the type of disaster, individuals are frequently victimized by theft of property from businesses and residences abandoned because of a disaster (either pre-disaster evacuation or to obtain living accommodations because of damaged apartments and homes).

Recommended measures to avoid becoming a victim of disaster fraud:

- Only make donations to known charities and only after contacting the charity directly and not in response to an email, instant message, phone call, text, etc. A recommended step is to research the charity by visiting recognized charity information/rating websites such as the Give.org, CharityNavigator.org, and CharityWatch.org
- Never click on a link in an unsolicited email, instant message, text, etc.
- Never assume that charity solicitations posted on the internet and social media are legitimate
- Avoid cash donations to charities - use a credit card or pay with a check
- Never transmit donations to a specifically named individual
- Charities do not seek donations via electronic fund (financial institution)/wire transfers, so do not wire donations
- Avoid being victimized by impersonators of government officials, insurance companies, investment companies, etc., by terminating the phone call or other exchange of information (e.g., email, texts) and calling the actual government agency, insurance company, and/or investment company directly using a well-advertised phone number or email address

Individuals who have been targeted by fraudsters or been the victim of disaster-related fraud are strongly encouraged to contact the NCDF at (866) 720-5721 or online at www.justice.gov/DisasterComplaintForm.

The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Florida is one of 94 offices that serve as the nation's principal litigators under the direction of the Attorney General. To access public court documents online, please visit the [U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Florida](http://www.uscourts.gov/uscourt) website. For more information about the U.S. Attorney's Office, Northern District of Florida, visit <http://www.justice.gov/usao/fln/index.html>.

#