



Beware of Door-to-Door Contractors During Flood Cleanup

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MADISON – This week’s heavy rains have led to flooding in northern Wisconsin, and an expected break in the weather may give homeowners a chance to clean up damage to their properties. In the hardest hit areas, homeowners may find their progress disrupted by door-to-door contractors promising to provide quick help at a great price.

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) is urging Wisconsin residents to be leery of promises made by these fly-by-night contractors (also known as “storm chasers”) as these operations have a history of doing subpar work for high prices or simply running off with a victim’s money.

“Storm chasers know that affected homeowners in hard-hit communities may be enticed by great deals on cleanup or repair help, and they are banking on these homeowners jumping at the first offer of assistance they receive,” said Frank Frassetto, Division Administrator for Trade and Consumer Protection. “Turn them away and do your research to find a reliable contractor.”

These teams come and go from an area without a trace, leaving consumers empty-handed and with no recourse for any work left unfinished or any damage they have done to a homeowner’s property. They may pressure homeowners for upfront payments or increase their prices arbitrarily as they work.

Consumer Protection offers these tips for homeowners with storm damage:

- Be wary of any contractor who knocks at your door. Call the police or sheriff’s department to check them out.
- Hire a contractor based on referrals. Ask friends and neighbors for recommendations and ask contractors for references. Before you sign a contract, contact the Bureau of Consumer Protection to see if we have received complaints about the business.
- Try to get a local contractor. Be careful if local contractors are using outside subcontractors.
- Get lien waivers from anyone you pay for home repairs. It is necessary to do this because if the person collecting the money does not pay the supplier or worker, a lien could be put on your property.
- Get a written contract with a start and completion date and warranty information. Also, make certain that the contract states exactly what work is to be done and what materials are to be used. Never rely on a verbal commitment.
- Have someone watch the work being done. Check with your local building inspector to see if the work requires a permit and make sure an inspector visits the job site before you provide final payment.
- Request a copy of the contractor’s certificate of liability insurance.

For additional information or to file a complaint, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at <http://datcp.wi.gov>, send an e-mail to datcp hotline@wisconsin.gov or call the Consumer Protection Hotline toll-free at 1-800-422-7128.

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