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**Steve Marshall**

Alabama Attorney General



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**Attorney General Steve Marshall Surveys Storm Damage and Provides Update to the People of Alabama on His Efforts to Combat Predatory Behavior Against Storm Victims and Good Samaritans**

(MONTGOMERY) – In the wake of the severe weather and tornadoes that swept across the state of Alabama on January 12, destroying homes and property and resulting in the deaths of seven Alabamians, Attorney General Steve Marshall today visited Selma to survey the storm damage and update the storm victims on his efforts to combat predatory behavior against them and those who wish to help their fellow citizens.

“The City of Selma and my Office have a very special link, as Selma is home to many of my employees and their families,” said Attorney General Marshall. “While it was painful to see the damage today firsthand, I was deeply moved by the community’s response. Mayor Perkins and Sheriff Mike Granthum know that I am only a phone call away and that they have my full support as the Queen City of the Black Belt begins its recovery efforts.”

**Information for Citizens Who Are Storm Victims**

*Price-Gouging Laws*

The Governor’s recent proclamation of a state of emergency activated Alabama’s price-gouging laws. As people recover and rebuild from storms, they should be wary of those who would prey upon them through the crime of price gouging. Although what constitutes an unconscionable price is not specifically set forth in state law, a price that is 25 percent or more above the average price charged in the same area within the last 30 days – unless the increase can be attributed to a reasonable cost – is a prima facie case of unconscionable pricing. The penalty is a fine of up to \$1,000 per violation, and those found to have willfully and continuously violated this law may be prohibited from doing business in Alabama.

Consumers can report concerns of illegal price gouging to the Attorney General’s Consumer Interest Division by calling 1-800-392-5658, by writing to 501 Washington



Avenue, Montgomery, Alabama 36104, or by visiting [AlabamaAG.gov/Consumer Complaint](http://AlabamaAG.gov/ConsumerComplaint).

### ***Home-Repair Fraud***

The Attorney General's Office, in association with the Home Builders Licensure Board, advises consumers to take the following steps when working with a contractor builder on storm-damage repairs:

- Ask if they are licensed. Ask to see the card! The HBLB license is a credit-card-sized license (a sample is listed on the HBLB website). You may check a builder's license status by calling 1-800-304-0853, or by visiting [HBLB.Alabama.gov](http://HBLB.Alabama.gov).
- Ask for and check references, especially if the builder makes unsolicited contact with you or is from out of town.
- Make sure quotes and contracts are in writing. Under state law, licensed homebuilders must use a written contract. Make sure it includes the contractor's full name, address, telephone number, a description of the work to be performed, starting and estimated completion dates, and the total cost of the job.
- Never make a full payment or substantial down payment up front. Do not make a final payment until you are satisfied and all subcontractors have been paid. If you are told that more money is needed in advance, be wary.
- Ask for proof of insurance, including workers' compensation and general liability.

Consumers can report concerns of home-repair fraud to the Attorney General's Consumer Interest Division by calling 1-800-392-5658, by writing to 501 Washington Avenue, Montgomery, Alabama 36104, or by visiting [AlabamaAG.gov/Consumer Complaint](http://AlabamaAG.gov/ConsumerComplaint).

### **Information for Citizens Who Wish to Donate to Storm Victims**

The Attorney General's Office advises citizens who wish to financially support storm victims to take the following precautions:

#### ***Do Your Research***

- Search the Alabama charities database on the Attorney General's website (click on "Consumer" in the top navigation bar and then select "License Search" from the dropdown menu).
- Check out the charity's ratings with groups like the BBB Wise Giving Alliance, Charity Navigator, and CharityWatch.
- Search the charity's name online with words like "complaint" and "scam."

### *Ask Questions*

- What are the charity's website, address, and mission?
- How much of your donation will go directly to services (rather than fundraising, etc.)?
- If you wish your donation to be used for Alabama's storm victims, verify that the charity will spend the money for this in particular.

### *Be Careful How You Pay*

- If someone asks you to send cash, wire money, donate by gift card, or leave money under your doormat for pickup, don't do it! That's how scammers often ask you to pay. It's safer to pay by credit card or check.
- If you're donating online, check that the webpage where you enter your payment information has "https" in the web address. That means your information is transmitted securely.
- Legitimate charities will give you a receipt with the amount of your donation. Keep that record and check your credit card and bank statements to make sure you're only charged for the donation you wished to make.

### *Watch Out for Scammers' Tricks*

- Scammers spoof caller ID to make their fundraising calls look like they are from your local area code or from an organization you know.
- Scammers pressure you into donating immediately before you have time to do research. Reputable charities do not use coercive tactics and welcome your donation at any time.

- Scammers will thank you for a donation you don't remember making. Scammers do that to trick you into thinking you actually made a pledge and to guilt you into sending money.

*Take Precautions with Donation Requests on Social Media and Crowdfunding Sites*

- While many requests for donations through social media and crowdfunding sites are legitimate, some are scams. For example, there are people who misuse real pictures and stories to get you to donate, but the money goes into their own pockets. Crowdfunding sites often have little control over who uses them and how donations are spent.
- Don't assume that solicitations on social media or crowdfunding sites are legitimate – even when they are shared or liked by your friends. Call or contact your friends offline to ask them about the post they shared.
- As always, research before you give.

For additional tips on safely donating to storm victims, you can visit the Federal Trade Commission's "How to Donate Wisely and Avoid Charity Scams" webpage at [FTC.gov/Charity](https://www.ftc.gov/charity).