



514 E. Thayer  
P.O. BOX 1416  
BISMARCK, ND 58502-1416

---

---

## BURLEIGH COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPT.

---

---

PAT HEINERT, SHERIFF



TELEPHONE 701-222-6651  
FAX 701-221-6899

July 27, 2011

Burleigh County Residents:

During the Recovery Phase of disasters there are those who will prey upon citizens who are tired and anxious to get life back to "normal".

It is our intent to supply you with important information so you can protect yourself and your property.

### Property Protection

Always lock your residences and outbuildings;  
Secure all tools and remodeling materials when not in use;  
Use lighting as a deterrent to intruders; and  
Report suspicious activity **immediately**.  
(See Programs at [burleighsd.com](http://burleighsd.com))

### Building Permits

Protect the outcome and investment value of your property;  
Guard against lawsuits and injury; and  
Reduce potential hazards of unsafe construction.

*Reminder:* major reconstruction, furnaces and water heaters require permits and inspections

**(See Contractors at [burleighco.com](http://burleighco.com) – go to Missouri River Information in the red colored bar area under the headings)**

### Contractors

Always consider local, reputable contractors – these are fellow community members who also have an investment here;  
All contractors **must** be licensed by the Secretary of State before they perform any work exceeding \$2,000;  
Do not pay "up front"; and  
Do not get pressured into signing anything (i.e. contracts, work agreements etc.) until you have checked on the contractor – take your time ...do it right!

(Continued on Back)

Please take the time to review the websites referenced. The information provided and the contacts listed should answer many of your questions or concerns.

If you are unable to access a computer please feel free to call:

- Bismarck and Burleigh Building Inspections ..... (701) 355-1465
- ND Office of Attorney General Consumer Protection Division ... (701) 328-3404
- ND Secretary of State ..... (701) 328-2900
- Burleigh County Sheriff's Department ..... (701) 222-6651
- Burleigh County Emergency Management ..... (701) 222-6727

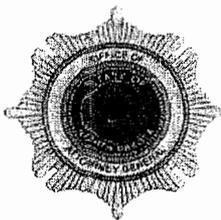
Access has been limited to flood inundated areas in Burleigh County as authorized by Governor Dalrymple's Executive Order 2011-17. These areas have been posted and signed with "Road Closed" barricades. The Burleigh County Sheriff's Department will continue to monitor these areas checking on individuals who may not be authorized to be there. Your patience and cooperation is very much appreciated during this time.

If you observe suspicious activity, report it immediately by calling 911.

Sincerely,



Pat Heinert, Sheriff  
Burleigh County Sheriff's Department



# Choosing a Contractor

Office of Attorney General, Consumer Protection Division

1050 E Interstate Avenue Suite 200, Bismarck, ND 58503. [www.ag.nd.gov](http://www.ag.nd.gov)

Tel: (701) 328-3404; Toll-free (800) 472-2600.

Home repair and improvement scams flourish in warm weather, following severe weather, and after a natural disaster. Unscrupulous, unlicensed, and unqualified out of state contractors are all too eager to take advantage of unsuspecting homeowners who just want to start putting their lives back together.

Many of these "storm chaser" contractors misrepresent their true business reputations, skill levels, and completion dates. Often they obtain temporary office locations in North Dakota so they can advertise as a local business, then offer work guarantees that immediately become worthless when the contractor skips town after the work is completed.

## Warning Signs

Recognize the tip-offs to 'fly-by-night' home repair or improvement swindlers. They include:

- Use of an unmarked vehicle; high pressure sales tactics or very low bids; requiring advance non-refundable payments or payment in full before the work is completed;
- Refusal or failure to give written estimates and contracts, or to provide references, proof of insurance, or required licenses.

Consider local, reputable contractors.

## Quick Tips

If the contractor is not a local business or has just set up an office, ask when the company first located to North Dakota, check the phone directory for a local business listing to see if the company has previously been a local business, and don't rely on promises that the company intends to stay in North Dakota.

Make sure your potential contractor is properly licensed. Contractors engaging in contracts exceeding \$2,000 must be licensed by the North Dakota Secretary of State. Check with the Secretary of State's Licensing Division to determine if those contractors are licensed by calling 701-328-3665 or 1-800-352-0867, ext. 8-3665.

Contractors also must be registered with ND Workforce Safety and Insurance (1-800-777-5033) and Job Service North Dakota (1-800-247-0981).

If the contractor is not a local business or has just set up an office, check with the Attorney General's Licensing Section at 701-328-2329 or online to determine if the contractor needs a "transient merchant's license." This requirement protects the homeowner, and includes a bond that may be available for a consumer complaint about the product or service.

Report suspected fraud to your local law enforcement agency or the Attorney General's Office.

**Research  
Your Project**

Before selecting a contractor, research the project so you will be knowledgeable about what the job involves. Your research should include what has to be done, the best way to do the work, and the types and costs of materials that should be used. You also may want to contact your local building inspector to find out what building permits are required for your job.

**Bids**

Get bids from several contractors. Friends and neighbors who have undertaken similar projects may give you the names of contractors they recommend. Trade associations, hardware, building supply, and home improvement stores also may be good sources for reputable contractors.

**Get Written  
bids**

Get at least two or three written bids for your project. Never accept a verbal estimate. Prepare a detailed list of work that needs to be done and the materials required. Meet with each contractor about the bid. In order to protect yourself, ask the contractor these questions:

- Is the business locally owned? How long has the business been established in the community? What is the permanent business address?
- Does the contractor have a driver's license? Obtain the name, address, and driver's license number for future reference.
- Will the contractor provide references? Get a list of names and phone numbers and call them.

**Compare  
Bids**

Carefully compare the written bids. Be sure each includes everything you want. The bid should serve as a starting point in your negotiations with the contractor. It is not necessarily the bottom line; less reputable contractors may cut corners for low bids.

**Insurance**

Make sure your contractor has liability insurance, otherwise, you may be liable for injuries to workers or others on your property, including damages to their personal property. Contact your insurance agent for more information.

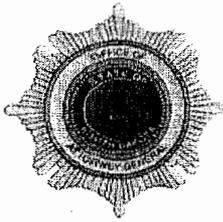
**Get a Written  
Contract**

The identification of the contractor, including name, business location and telephone numbers should be written into the contract. Answers to the following questions should also be in the written contract:

- When will the work begin? How long will it take? What will it involve?
- What type, grade and quality of material will be used? How much will it cost? Will subcontractors be used? If so, who-and how will they be paid?
- What guarantees and warranties will I receive? Will the contractor obtain the necessary licenses and permits?

**Rebuilding**

Rebuilding after a natural disaster? Find detailed information about *Disaster Scams* online at [www.ag.nd.gov](http://www.ag.nd.gov) on the News/Publications/Forms link, or call the Consumer Protection division.



# Disaster Scams

Office of Attorney General, Consumer Protection Division

1050 E Interstate Avenue Suite 200, Bismarck, ND 58503. [www.ag.nd.gov](http://www.ag.nd.gov)

Tel: (701) 328-3404; Toll-free (800) 472-2600.

During an emergency or disaster situation, local authorities broadcast information over local media outlets. After the emergency, state and local authorities use newspapers, and television and radio stations to provide vital information about public health and safety, utility work, sanitation, and other recovery efforts.

As efforts focus on recovery and rebuilding, local businesses and legitimate charities work hard to keep up with community needs. Unfortunately, some dishonest people take advantage of the situation to make a quick profit at your expense. The road to recovery from a natural disaster is hard enough without falling victim to a scam.

## Common Scams

- **Form Completion services.** Beware of people charging a fee to help you complete disaster assistance forms (such as FEMA or SBA), or obtaining assistance checks. These services are provided free through FEMA and the Red Cross.
- **Phony Inspectors.** Never let anyone in until you have verified they have the appropriate credentials. Always ask for a telephone number so you can confirm the inspector is working for an authorized agency.
- **Government Grant Offers.** Be aware of entities offering "free grant money" for flood repair or disaster relief. A true grant is free and never requires any upfront fees or repayment. Check with a regional or state economic development office to see if they know of grant programs for which you might qualify, or contact your local social service agency for information or assistance.
- **Advance Fee Loans.** Advance fee loans are illegal. Ignore any company that "guarantees" you will receive a loan. Dishonest operators will charge a processing fee, then promise they will find a lender. It is illegal to charge an up-front fee. Also, companies must be registered with the ND Department of Financial Institutions (701-328-9933) in order to lend money to ND consumers.
- **Water Testing & Purifiers.** Monitor local news media for instructions from health authorities regarding water safety and purification. Avoid offers for "free" home water testing, and be skeptical of claims that an in-home test shows your water is unsafe. If you have questions about the safety of your water, contact your local public health authority.

## Transient Merchants

If someone comes to your door offering to do home repairs, ask to see the "Transient Merchant's License." All transient merchants must be licensed and bonded by the Licensing division of the Attorney General's office. You may be able to file a claim against the bond if you have a problem with the product or service.

(Continued on next page)

**Transient Merchants (continued)**

Contact the Licensing division at 701-328-2329 or check the current State Transient Merchant License holders online at: <http://www.ag.nd.gov/Licensing/Licensing.htm> on the "License Holders" link.

Contact your local law enforcement agency immediately if the contractor cannot produce the transient merchant license.

**Right to Cancel**

North Dakota law gives you three business days to cancel the purchase of merchandise or services if the purchase amount exceeds \$25 and the transaction occurred away from a permanent place of business. If you are over 65 you have 15 business days to cancel a transaction over \$50. The contractor or seller must give you written and verbal notice of this right.

**Rebuilding**

Severe weather damage attracts door-to-door repair operators and out-of-state contractors who swarm the area. These contractors may seem attractive at first because they do not have a long waiting list, but many transient operators are scam artists looking for the next victim. Don't make it easy for them. A reputable local company will be around later if you have problems, and that alone may be worth the wait.

It is a sure sign of fraud if the contractor:

- Is unable or unwilling to provide proof of licensing, bonding and insurance.
- Insists on full payment or a large down payment before work begins or tries to pressure you into signing a contract.
- Offers a great price because there are left-over materials from a previous job or offers a discount for finding other customers.
- Be sure to do some price comparison shopping when buying items to repair and clean up your property.

All contractors must be licensed by the Secretary of State before they perform any work. Contact the Secretary of State at 701-328-3665, or toll-free 1-800-352-0867, or check online at: <http://www.nd.gov/sos/licensing/>.

Before signing a contract, make sure the licensed contractor also has both liability insurance and Workforce Safety and Insurance coverage.

**Choosing a Contractor**

**Rebuilding after a disaster?** Find detailed information and tips about *Choosing a Contractor* online at [www.ag.nd.gov](http://www.ag.nd.gov) on the News/Publications/Forms link, or call the Consumer Protection division.

**State Agency Websites**

Department of Emergency Services: <http://www.nd.gov/des/>

North Dakota Job Service: <http://www.jobsnd.com/>

Workforce Safety & Insurance: <http://www.workforcesafety.com/>

Secretary of State: <http://www.nd.gov/sos/>



FEMA

## Disaster Survivors -- Beware Of Scams!

Release Date: June 16, 2011

Release Number: 1991-009

-- Disasters typically bring out the very best in people and there are countless stories of neighbors helping neighbors. Unfortunately, some scam artists try and take advantage of disaster survivors looking for help, by trying to gather your personal information or to collect payment for disaster assistance.

If there is any doubt, do not give out information, and report people claiming to be government workers to local authorities. To safeguard against disaster-related fraud, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) officials recommend the following precautions:

- **Ask for official laminated photo ID.** A FEMA shirt or U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) jacket is not absolute proof of identity.
- **Safeguard personal information.** Do not give personal information such as Social Security and bank account numbers unless you initiate the call. FEMA inspectors never require this information. Applicants wanting direct deposit for grant assistance are asked for bank account information after they call or go online to apply; on follow-up calls, a FEMA representative may ask only for the last four digits of an applicant's Social Security number to verify identity.
- **Beware of people going door-to-door.** People going door-to-door to damaged homes, or phoning homeowners claiming to be building contractors could be scam artists, especially if they solicit financial information.
- **FEMA Community Relations staff** distribute flyers that mention personal information such as Social Security and bank account numbers. However, they will not ask for this personal information from applicants; they are merely telling what information applicants should have on hand when they call or go online to apply for help.
- **Federal workers do not solicit or accept money.** FEMA and SBA staff never charge applicants for disaster assistance, inspections or help in filling out applications. FEMA inspectors verify damage, but do not hire or endorse specific contractors to fix homes or recommend repairs.

Suspicious activity should be reported to local authorities or to the FEMA application Helpline at 1-800-621-FEMA (3362), TTY 1-800-462-7585. The same number can be used to apply for FEMA assistance, or by web enabled mobile device [m.fema.gov](http://m.fema.gov), or go online to [www.disasterassistance.gov](http://www.disasterassistance.gov).