

PRESS RELEASE



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*******CONSUMER ALERT*****CONSUMER ALERT*******

**MADIGAN WARNS CONSUMERS TO REMAIN ALERT FOR
"STORM CHASERS" WHO FOLLOW BAD WEATHER**

Chicago - Just three weeks after devastating tornadoes and severe storms raced through central Illinois resulting in millions of dollars of property damage and a presidential disaster declaration, more storms have hit central and southern Illinois. As a result, Attorney General Lisa Madigan today again urged all Illinoisans affected by the severe weather to protect themselves from the inevitable home repair con artists eager to exploit natural disasters for personal profit.

"Unfortunately, nature's power was exhibited once again Sunday," Madigan said. "And once again, citizens and businesses will be faced with dual tasks of regrouping and repairing damage while keeping an eye out for repair fraud."

Madigan warned consumers to resist the desire to act too hastily in trying to get their lives and property back to normal.

"A storm chaser knows how to take advantage of the emotional aftermath of spring storms and, many times, is able to convince individuals into making a snap home or business repair decision," Madigan said.

Madigan warned consumers and business owners to be careful before contracting to have damaged or destroyed property rebuilt and not to rush in to contractual agreements or make large down payments. Madigan also urged consumers to alert both her office and local law enforcement if suspicious storm chasers begin soliciting in the area.

Madigan's Consumer Protection Division offered the following tips to help protect individuals and companies from being duped by dishonest contractors:

- Be wary of door-to-door solicitors because many home repair con artists are transients who move quickly into a troubled area. Ask for recommendations from people you know and trust. Whenever possible, use established local contractors.
- Call Madigan's Consumer Fraud Hotline to check out a business and to find out how many consumer complaints, if any, have been filed against a particular business.

- Ask to see any required state or local permits or licenses. Remember that insurance adjusters must be licensed by the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation, Division of Insurance, and roofers must be licensed by the Division of Professional Regulation.
- Shop around for the best deal. Get written estimates from several contractors and don't allow a salesperson to rush you into a deal.
- Get all terms of a contract in writing; obtain a copy of the signed contract and never make full payment until all work has been completed to your satisfaction.
- Be aware that you have the right to cancel within three business days if you sign a contract based on a salesman who comes to your home.
- Do not pay in cash.

Madigan reminded consumers that the Illinois Home Repair and Remodeling Act requires contractors to furnish customers with written contracts for any repair or remodeling work costing more than \$1,000. A contract must be signed by both the customer and the contractor.

The law also requires contractors to carry at least minimum amounts of insurance for property damage, bodily injury and improper home repair. Contractors also must provide consumers with an informational pamphlet entitled "Home Repair: Know Your Consumer Rights."

Madigan added that scam artists even attempt to impersonate government agencies. Following the March 12 tornadoes in Springfield, media reports indicated consumers were called by someone claiming to be associated with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) requesting bank account information from the consumer that would assist with the repair of their storm-damaged home.

"Episodes like this are a reminder to consumers to never give out personal or financial information over the telephone," Madigan said.