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Storm scammer warning

Comments

June 22, 2010

News-Sun Staff Report

Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan is urging residents affected by Friday's storms to protect themselves from home repair con artists.

In a release from her office, Madigan warned that scam artists frequently take advantage of people scrambling to make repairs. These "storm chasers" try to catch people when they are desperate and pressure them into making a quick, often expensive, decision, Madigan said.

> Click to enlarge image



Marjorie Bock who lives at 14995 West Wadsworth Road in Wadsworth looks at a hickory nut tree knocked down by the storm Friday afternoon in the front yard. (Michael Schmidt / News-Sun)

She has urged consumers to alert both her office and local law enforcement if they are solicited by storm chasers.

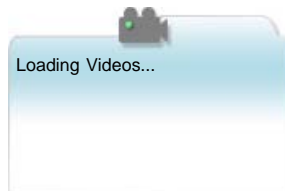
Madigan's offered these self-protection tips:

- Call the Attorney General's Consumer Fraud Hotline to check out a contractor and to find out how many consumer complaints, if any, have been filed against a particular business. Chicago office: (800) 386-5438; (800) 964-3013 (TTY). Spanish: (866) 310-8398.
- Be wary of repair contractors who go door-to-door. Con artists are often transients who move quickly into a troubled area. Ask for recommendations from people you know and trust and, whenever possible, use established local contractors.
- Even if there is a need to act quickly, shop around for the best deal. Get written estimates from several contractors and don't be rushed into a deal.
- Get all of the terms of a contract in writing and obtain a copy of the signed contract. Never make full payment until all the work has been completed to your satisfaction. Do not pay in cash.
- Be aware that you have the right to cancel within three business days if you sign a contract based on a salesman's visit to your home.

Madigan emphasized that the Illinois Home Repair and Remodeling Act requires contractors to furnish written contracts for any repair or

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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 the pamphlet "Home Repair: Know Your Consumer Rights."

Madigan also warned that some scam artists have impersonate government agencies, including association with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and requested bank account information.

"Consumers should never give out personal or financial information over the telephone," Madigan said. "Legitimate government agencies do not call consumers asking for this information."

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