






FRAUD PREVENTION TIPS

for **Natural Disaster** or **Emergencies**

During natural disasters, Veterans can be highly targeted by various scams and fraudulent activities when their homes have been impacted and have damage. Scammers might take advantage of the chaos and desperation that often these events bring. Below are some tools to help protect you and loved ones during these difficult times.

Common Emergency or Disaster Schemes:

-  **Contractor Fraud:** After a disaster, people may need urgent repairs to their homes or property. Dishonest contractors may take advantage by offering services at inflated prices, doing low quality work, or disappearing after receiving payment.
-  **Phony FEMA or Government Representatives:** Scammers may pose as FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) or government officials and contact disaster victims to steal personal information, request payment for services, or offer fake assistance. Note that no FEMA, federal, or state workers will ask for or accept any form of payment.
-  **Mortgage repayment/modification scams:** After a disaster you still must make your mortgage payment. Veterans should contact their insurance company and mortgage servicer and if necessary, ask for help. Home loan or housing scams may involve mortgage lenders, brokers and other entities making false promises; credit organizations charging excessive fees or making false promises to provide free services. Scammers may also offer to provide home repair or offer to assist you with services with the intent to manipulate and/or steal from you.

See next page for more tips about fraud prevention, help and reporting 

A photograph showing construction workers on a roof. One worker is on a ladder, and another is standing on the roof. They appear to be working on a green roof panel. The background shows a clear blue sky and some trees.

How to Avoid Housing Scams

During Emergency/Disaster Situations:

DO'S

- Contact VA directly to assist you with managing your debt. <https://www.va.gov/manage-va-debt>.
- Contact VA Loan Guaranty Service at 1-877-827-3702 if you are having trouble making your VA-guaranteed mortgage payment(s).
- Be mindful of any loan asking for money up front. Legitimate lenders will charge you a fee after your loan has been approved, not before.
- Get receipts for any monies paid for services.
- Read the fine print.
- Deal with established, reputable contractors for repairs.
- Gather information from reputable sources. For example, additional mortgage resources are available from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau website <https://www.consumerfinance.gov/consumer-tools/mortgages>.

DON'TS

- Don't make a decision under pressure. Never sign anything without reading it completely and understanding it first.
- Do not sign over the title to your property.
- Do not pay entire fees before any services are provided.
- Do not give out personal information to a lender or servicer who contacts you out of the blue. Scammers can spoof phone numbers, so you can't rely on caller identification. If you're unsure, it's always safer to hang up and call your loan servicer directly at the number on your mortgage statement.
- If taking out new loans, do not choose a lender that requires no documentation or background checks to provide you with a loan.
- Never pay anyone to negotiate with your mortgage servicer on your behalf.

REPORTING INFORMATION

- For suspected VA Benefits Fraud, call the VA Benefits Hotline: 1-800-827-1000
- For all non-Veterans Affairs related fraud, reach out the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). Online: <https://reportfraud.ftc.gov>. Phone: (877) FTC- HELP (877)-382-4357

VA



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of Veterans Affairs