Following a Natural Disaster, Avoid Home Repair Scams

The aftermath of a natural disaster is prime time for home repair scams. The general ruse involves someone coming to your door and offering to do work on your home, typically at a big discount. While not all door-to-door offers are scams, some are. Do your research if an offer seems too good to be true. The AARP Fraud Watch Network has heard from victims who’ve lost thousands of dollars to unscrupulous contractors and outright scammers.

How it works:

A con artist representing himself as a contractor comes to your door and claims he has just finished a job for a neighbor. Since he’s in the neighborhood, he’ll say, you can get work done at a steep discount. While that’s a common sales tactic, it can also be a sign of a scam. Scammers will demand payment upfront, and then disappear. Or they’ll do the work but it will be shoddy. Or they will demand more money to finish the job.

What you should know:

- Be wary of anyone who comes to your door and offers to fix a problem.
- The con artist will try to pressure you into making a decision quickly.
- He or she will likely ask you to pay for the work upfront.

What you should do:

- Get a written estimate and compare bids before starting any work.
- Ask a contractor for three references – and check them.
- Check with the Better Business Bureau for complaints before you hire a contractor.
- Make sure you have a written contract before work starts.

Be careful if you choose to work with contractors who contact you. When you do need to get work done, ask friends, neighbors and relatives for recommendations. Most importantly, never pay a thing until you have a written contract in hand.

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