



# HURRICANE IRMA

# FLORIDA CONSUMER ALERT

435-7352

352-9832

[FloridaConsumerHelp.com](http://FloridaConsumerHelp.com) / 1-800-HELP-FLA / 1-800-FL-AYUDA

## *Consumer Assistance: It's Just a Click Away*

In the wake of a natural disaster like Hurricane Irma, it is important to know where to turn for help and information. The primary role of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Division of Consumer Services is to protect, inform and empower Florida's consumers and businesses. The division serves as the state's clearinghouse for consumer complaints and information, educating consumers and conducting investigations of unfair and deceptive trade practices.

Some of the many tools available to consumers at [FloridaConsumerHelp.com](http://FloridaConsumerHelp.com) include:

### General tips for consumers:

- Be skeptical of any unsolicited telephone call, letter or e-mail.
- Be wary of anyone requiring payment through money transfer, money order or by sending cash. Purchases made by credit card will allow the consumer the ability to dispute charges.
- Get details in writing before signing agreements, sending money or giving financial information.
- Check a company's complaint history at [FloridaConsumerHelp.com](http://FloridaConsumerHelp.com) or by calling 800-HELPFLA (435-7352). If the business is regulated by the division, be sure to find out if they are registered.
- If you receive a solicitation to contribute to a charity, use "Check-A-Charity" at [FloridaConsumerHelp.com](http://FloridaConsumerHelp.com) or call 800-HELPFLA (435-7352) to inquire about the registration status or financial information.

- ✓ **A-Z Resource Guide:** Get directions to the most appropriate agency for assistance with a wide variety of topics.
- ✓ **Business/Complaint Lookup:** Search for information about whether a business is properly licensed/registered and review the company's complaint history before engaging in business with them.
- ✓ **Check-A-Charity:** Search charity licensing and funding information to see how your contribution is being spent.
- ✓ **Education:** Find information on common scams and frauds, read or request publications on a variety of consumer related topics, or request a speaker for your next event or meeting.
- ✓ **File a Complaint:** File consumer complaints online or download complaint forms.
- ✓ **Florida Do Not Call:** Subscribe residential and mobile telephone numbers free of charge to avoid unwanted solicitation calls.

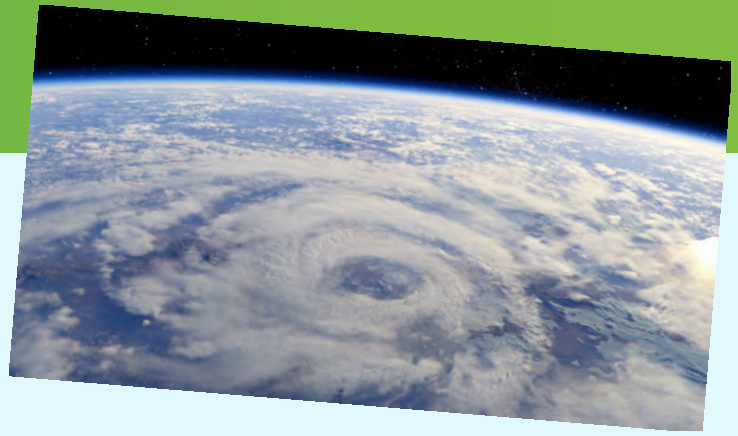
*Consumers or businesses that need information can contact the division's call center, which is staffed with trained analysts who answer questions on almost any topic. The call center can be reached at 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352) or 1-800-FL-AYUDA (352-9832) en Español.*



Subscribe to Commissioner Putnam's weekly email to receive updates about the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

**Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services**

## *What you need to know after the storm passes by.*



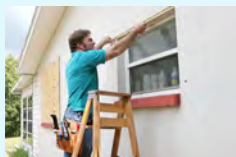
**Auto Damage:** The [Florida Motor Vehicle Repair Act](#) requires anyone who is paid to repair motor vehicles owned by other individuals to register with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS). The act applies to dealers of new and used cars, trucks and motorcycles; garages; service stations; self-employed persons; truck stops; and paint, body, brake, muffler, transmission, mobile repair and glass shops. The act establishes requirements for estimates and invoices. Review estimates and contracts carefully for language that may assign your insurance policy benefits directly to the repair shop. Click [Motor Vehicle Repair](#) for more information.

---



**Charities:** Give wisely! All charities soliciting within the state of Florida (excluding religious, educational, political and governmental agencies) are required to register and file financial information with FDACS. Call 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352) or use our online [Check-A-Charity](#) tool to find out if a charity is properly registered. You can also find out how much the charity is spending on administration and fundraising and how much money goes to actual programming.

---



**Contractors:** Check the license and complaint history of contractors before signing a contract or agreeing to have anyone do work for you. Call the Department of Business and Professional Regulation at (850) 487-1395 or go to [MyFloridaLicense.com](#). Do not sign an "Assignment of Benefits" form for a contractor if you have not been instructed to do so by your insurance company.

---



**File a Complaint:** Do you have a complaint about a business? FDACS can help, regardless of whether we regulate the specific industry. Call 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352) or click [File a Complaint](#) for assistance.

---



**Food Safety:** Discard perishable food that has been stored in temperatures above 41° F for four or more hours. Dispose of any food that has an unusual odor, color or texture or feels warm to the touch. If in doubt, throw it out! Inspect canned foods for damage. Damaged canned food shows swelling, leaking, punctures, holes, fractures, deep rusting, crushing or denting. If flooding occurs, discard any food not in a waterproof container that has come into contact with flood water. Contact your county Department of Health if you suspect that your well may be contaminated.

---





**Fuel:** The potential for water-contaminated fuel incidents increase after a considerable storm. If you witness flooding at a station during or immediately following a storm report it to the department so we can have an inspector check the storage tanks for water contamination. Always keep the receipt of purchase and report any possible contaminated fuel incidents to the department immediately.



**Generators:** Never use a generator, grill, camp stove or other gasoline, propane, natural gas or charcoal-burning devices inside a home, garage, basement, crawlspace or any partially enclosed area. Keep these devices outdoors, away from doors, windows and vents that could allow carbon monoxide to come indoors.



**Insurance:** Have you received a robocall after the storm regarding your insurance premium? Don't fall for it. Call your insurance agent to verify any messages you receive about your insurance.



**Landlord/Tenant:** If you live in a rental property that was damaged by the storm, you need to know your rights and responsibilities and those of your landlord. Visit [Landlord/Tenant Law](#) for more information or refer to Florida's Landlord/Tenant Law, [Chapter 83](#), Part II, Florida Statutes.



**Price Gouging:** Anyone who suspects price gouging should call the Office of the Attorney General at (866) 9NO-SCAM or file a complaint online at [MyFloridaLegal.com](#).



**Skimmers:** Thieves will take advantage of power outages to install skimming devices. Always check for security measures on the pump and be aware of your surroundings. Look around for possible cameras, or any suspicious equipment that doesn't belong on the pump. Please remember not all pumps require security tape; some pump systems have internal security. If in doubt, ask the store personal about the pump security. Report any evident signs of tampering or unauthorized access to fuel dispensers to the department.

*The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Division of Consumer Services is the state's clearinghouse for consumer complaints, information and protection. Call 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352) or 1-800-FL-AYUDA (352-9832) en Español for more information or visit [FloridaConsumerHelp.com](#).*

