

NATURAL DISASTER GUIDE

Hiring Unlicensed Contractors Can Be Disastrous

Natural disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes and floods have a great impact on Florida's businesses. Without creating a business disaster plan and taking the necessary precautions, businesses may be closed for days, weeks or even months after the storm has passed, threatening jobs and Florida's economy. For more information on how to prepare for natural disasters, visit <http://floridadisaster.org/DEMbusiness.asp>.

In the event of a natural disaster, remember that all repair work performed on your home or business should be completed by a licensed professional. Contractors travel from out of state to a disaster area and take advantage of the large amount of repair work to be done. Remember that even if they are licensed in another state to perform construction services, they must also obtain a state license from DBPR to perform those services on your home or business here in Florida. Unlicensed activity occurs when a person who is not licensed by the state performs or offers to perform a job or service that requires licensure in one of the professions regulated by the Division of Regulation, Division of Real Estate and/or Division of Certified Public Accounting. During a declared State of Emergency, the penalty for unlicensed activity becomes a third-degree felony.

Follow these steps to prevent becoming the victim of an unlicensed activity scam after a natural disaster:

1. Know what services require a state license.

Below are some examples of common storm-related services that may or may not require a state license from DBPR. These lists are not intended to be comprehensive, and any additional or detailed questions should be directed to the Department by calling 850.487.1395. Consumers should check with their local building departments to determine if there are additional permitting and/or licensing requirements for their area.

Services Requiring a License

Roof Repairs
New or Replacement Roof
Installing New Windows
Plumbing Repairs
Electrical Repairs or Rewiring

Services Not Requiring a License

Trimming or Removing a Fallen Tree
Removing Debris
Placing a Tarp on a Roof

2. Verify licenses before you hire a contractor or sign a contract.

Protect yourselves from unlicensed activity. Always verify the license online or call the Customer Contact Center at 850.487.1395. DBPR also has a free smartphone app that enables consumers to search for state licenses by name or license number. Download the app on iTunes or the Google Play app store.

3. Use your best judgment when signing a contract and making payments.

Do not pay cash in full before the work is completed and be cautious of writing checks made payable to individuals, especially when dealing with a company. Get everything in writing, including a detailed description of the work to be completed, a completion date and the total cost. Be wary of individuals who only produce an “occupational license,” or corporate filing. An “occupational license” only means that the person has paid a tax receipt to the local municipality.

4. Report unlicensed activity.

During a disaster DBPR may dispatch teams to conduct door-to-door sweeps in conjunction with law enforcement, building departments and other state agencies. Report unlicensed activity by calling the Department’s Unlicensed Activity Program at 1.866-532-1440 or emailing ULA@myfloridalicense.com.