



Weather Damage Can Lead To “Storm Chaser” Scams

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Contact: Brock Bergey, 608-224-5007

LA CROSSE – The Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection reminds victims of yesterday’s severe weather to use caution when hiring a contractor to fix any damage caused by Mother Nature.

“Storm chasers follow the path of a major storm, going from home to home to pressure victims into paying up front for quick repairs,” said Sandy Chalmers, Administrator of the Division of Trade and Consumer Protection. “Do your homework before hiring anyone for home repair.”

Sometimes these storm chasers arrive on scene shortly after the storm, collect money up front for promised repairs, and then disappear without doing any work. In other cases, the contractor starts the work and then asks for more money than the agreed upon price to finish the project.

Home repair contractors are not licensed by the State of Wisconsin, as required in other trades such as plumbing; however, state law does impose a registration requirement for contractors through the Wisconsin Department of Commerce.

“Storm chasers are typically from out-of-state and swoop in after a natural disaster or storm,” added Chalmers. “They have little or no background in home repair, and charge high prices for shoddy work.”

Consumer Protection offers these timely tips:

- Be wary of any contractor who knocks at your door. Call the police or sheriff’s department to check them out.
- Try to get a local contractor. Ask contractors if they are subcontracting your job. Be careful if local contractors are using outside subcontractors.
- Get lien waivers from anyone you pay for home repairs. It is necessary to do this because if the person collecting the money doesn’t pay the supplier or worker, a lien could be put on your property.
- Get a written contract, with a start and completion date, and warranty information. Also make certain the contract states exactly what work is to be done, what materials are to be used, and if a down-payment is required. Never rely on verbal commitment.
- Contractors who register with the state are issued a card. Make sure any contractor you are considering hiring shows you their state registration card.
- Have someone watch the work being done. Ask your local building inspectors to visit your job site often.
- Request a copy of the contractor’s certificate of liability insurance.
- Check with the Bureau of Consumer Protection and Better Business Bureau (1-800-273-1002) to see if there are complaints on record against a contractor you are considering.

For more consumer information, or to file a consumer complaint, visit the Bureau of Consumer Protection's website at datcp.wisconsin.gov; via e-mail at datcp hotline@wisconsin.gov; or call toll-free at 1-800-422-7128.