



## GREGORY D. TOTTEN District Attorney

### Keeping Safe as You Rebuild

As we come together to rebuild our homes and our community it is important to remember that there are some unsavory profiteers willing to take advantage of this vulnerable time. Below are five common crimes that happen after a tragedy:

#### **Price Gouging**

For 30 days from December 5, 2017, the date a state of emergency was declared, it is illegal for people to raise costs more than 10 percent from the price charged immediately beforehand. This includes essential goods and services such as: food items, goods and services used for emergency clean up, emergency supplies, medical supplies, home heating oil, building materials, housing, transportation, freight, storage services, and gasoline. Under Penal Code section 396 Price Gouging is a misdemeanor that includes a sentence up to one year in jail and a fine up to \$10,000.

#### **Charitable Scams**

Be careful when giving – not all charities are legitimate. Check out the organization first or give to known charities. Don't give money to people soliciting over the phone or going door to door. Be alert – even GoFund pages can be fraudulent. The Better Business Bureau has a helpful website located at: [www.give.org](http://www.give.org)

#### **Contractor Fraud**

Not every contractor has a license. Not every licensed contractor is honest. Be careful who you hire. Check them out with the Contractors State Licensing Board at: <http://www.cslb.ca.gov/>

You can also look them up on the Tri-County Better Business Bureau website at: <https://www.bbb.org/santa-barbara>

If things start to go south with a contractor, stop giving them money! Wait until you have resolved the issue before making any additional payments.

#### **Insurance Fraud**

Insurance companies are an important part of the rebuilding process. Stay in close contact with yours. It is a crime under Penal Codes section 550 to make material misrepresentations to an insurance company regarding work performed or the cost of work performed. Make sure you know what bills are being given to your insurance carrier. If you can, review all bills for accuracy before sending them to your insurance company. If you are not using a contractor provided by your insurance, do not allow contractors to submit bills directly to your carrier.

#### **Haul Away Crimes**

Some home debris contains hazardous materials that need special handling and cannot be placed into a landfill. Asbestos, often found in insulation, drywall and tiles, is a common material that has special clean up requirements. Be careful when contracting with someone to perform home clean up. Sometimes untrained haul away companies can put themselves and your families at risk.

If you suspect you have been the victim of one of these crimes please call the District Attorney's Office at (805) 662-1750.