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AG STEVE MARSHALL, HOME BUILDERS LICENSURE BOARD WARN AGAINST HOME REPAIR FRAUD FOLLOWING STORM DAMAGE IN NORTH ALABAMA

(MONTGOMERY) –Attorney General Steve Marshall and Home Builders Licensure Board Executive Director J.R. “Chip” Carden Jr. are warning against possible home repair fraud and unlicensed builders in the wake of tornadoes and severe weather that caused widespread serious damage throughout parts of north and central Alabama* on Monday. They were joined by Jimmy Rutland, president of the Home Builders Association of Alabama; Alabama State Fire Marshall Scott Pilgreen; Brian Powell, director of the Strengthen Alabama Homes Division of the Alabama Department of Insurance; and Brian E. Hastings, director of the Alabama Emergency Management Agency.

“The good people of Alabama are strong and determined, and we come together in times of crisis such as this,” said Attorney General Marshall. “In the devastation left by these storms, there is much rebuilding to be done. As we move forward, it is important that consumers are mindful that unscrupulous people may seek to take advantage of their misfortune. To those who have suffered damage, we urge you to take precautions for your protection, and to those who would take advantage of this disaster, we warn that home repair fraud is a serious crime that will not be tolerated.”

“Do your homework,” Carden advised. “Call any references the builder gives you, and check with the licensure board to see if a builder is licensed and in good standing. Don’t be in a rush. A bad decision now can make a difficult situation even worse.”

They recommended that consumers take the following precautions when hiring a builder or someone to make home repairs:

- Find out as much as you can about them, especially if they make unsolicited contact with you or have come from out-of-town after a natural disaster.
- Ask for proof that they are bonded or insured.

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- Ask if they are licensed. Ask to see the card! For residential construction over \$10,000 a builder must be licensed by the Home Builders Licensure Board. Plumbers, HVAC contractors and electricians must be licensed by the state regardless of the cost of work. There also may be local permitting and license requirements, so check with local city or county government. You may check with the Alabama Home Builders Licensure Board to see if a contractor is licensed by calling 1-800-304-0853, or by visiting www.hblb.alabama.gov.
- Ask if this particular job requires a permit and contact your local city and county government to see if a permit is required. Do not let them talk you into applying for a homeowner's permit. If they do not want to be known to local officials, they may be hiding a bad reputation.
- Obtain several written estimates. Beware of estimates that are well below the market price or seem "too good to be true."
- Ask for references. Get names and addresses, and call them.
- Require a written contract. Under state law, licensed homebuilders must use a written contract. Make sure it includes the contractor's full name, address, and telephone number; a description of the work to be performed; starting and estimated completion dates; and the total cost of the job.
- NEVER make a full payment or a substantial down payment up front. Do not make final payment until you are satisfied and all subcontractors have been paid. If they tell you more money is needed in advance, be wary. They should be able to pay for supplies or have credit to make necessary purchases until you compensate them afterward.
- Make sure you can contact them. Be certain to get an office number and a cell phone number, and a physical address. Businesses with established addresses may be safer.

Attorney General Marshall urges consumers and officials to report any problems of alleged fraud or scams to his consumer protection office by calling toll-free 1-800-392-5658, by writing to 501 Washington Avenue, Montgomery, Alabama, 36130, or through the Attorney General's main web page at www.ago.alabama.gov.

**A State of Emergency was declared for the following counties in Alabama: Blount, Calhoun, Cherokee, Clay, Cleburne, Colbert, Cullman, DeKalb, Etowah, Fayette, Franklin, Jackson, Jefferson, Lamar, Lauderdale, Lawrence, Limestone, Madison, Marion, Marshall, Morgan, Randolph, Shelby, St. Clair, Talladega, Walker and Winston.*

Here are links to two photos from today's news conference:

[https://ago.alabama.gov/Documents/news/AG%203-23-18%20\(1\).JPG](https://ago.alabama.gov/Documents/news/AG%203-23-18%20(1).JPG)

[https://ago.alabama.gov/Documents/news/AG%203-23-18%20\(2\).JPG](https://ago.alabama.gov/Documents/news/AG%203-23-18%20(2).JPG)