



# Disaster News

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## BEWARE OF IDENTITY THIEVES

**CLEVELAND** – The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Ohio Emergency Management Agency are warning Ohio residents against a particular kind of fraud that always seems to follow in the wake of a major disaster - identity theft.

People living in the Ashtabula, Geauga and Lake counties may receive a letter, a phone call, or an email from someone posing as a state or federal official. They claim that they are holding a disaster assistance grant or loan for the applicant, and that all they need is the person's bank account number, social security number, or other personal information to complete the processing. In some cases, they may even ask for a "processing fee" up front.

A twist on the same scheme is for someone pretending to work for a volunteer organization to offer to help fill out an application for disaster assistance. The real object, of course, is to steal the victim's banking information.

"These scam artists are trying to rip off people who have already suffered losses as a result of these storms," says Nancy Dragani, Ohio EMA executive director and state coordinating officer for this disaster. "That's when people are the most vulnerable and we don't want them to become victims twice."

"Don't be fooled by come-ons like these!" warns Jesse Munoz, FEMA's federal coordinating officer. "Neither FEMA nor the state will ever call you asking for that information – or for a fee of any kind," he explained. "The only time FEMA collects banking information is when the applicant first registers for assistance and requests direct deposit for aid funds. But again, that occurs only when the applicant calls FEMA, not the other way around."

When in doubt, call FEMA's help line at **1-800-621-FEMA (3362)** or **TTY 1-800-462-7585**. That way, you know whom you're talking to.

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*FEMA manages federal response and recovery efforts following any national incident. FEMA also initiates mitigation activities, works with state and local emergency managers, and manages the National Flood Insurance Program. FEMA became a part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security on March 1, 2003.*

*The Ohio EMA coordinates state assistance and resources during an emergency and prepares the state for all hazards through planning, training, exercises and funding activities at the state and local levels. This includes providing eligible assistance to individuals and governmental entities recovering from disaster-related damage and costs.*

*County EMA plans, trains, and exercises for any emergency/disaster, natural or man-made, that may impact the county. County EMA coordinates the local disaster declaration and, when needed, coordinates response and recovery efforts with the Ohio EMA and FEMA. After the disaster is over, county EMA works with local, state, and federal officials to identify and implement mitigation efforts, which may limit the occurrence of future disasters*

*FEMA's temporary housing assistance and grants for public transportation expenses, medical and dental expenses, and funeral and burial expenses do not require individuals to apply for an SBA loan. However, an applicant must complete an SBA loan application to be eligible for assistance that covers personal property, vehicle repair or replacement, and moving and storage expenses.*