

Beware of Oil Spill Scams

There has been an alarming increase in the number of scams associated with the Deepwater Horizon oil spill catastrophe. The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services has developed this web page to keep consumers informed and educated as to the variety of potential scams and the methods that may be utilized by these unscrupulous con-artists. Remember...consumer education is the best defense against fraud and deception!

In order to perpetrate any type of scam or fraud, the scammer must be in contact or have communication with the potential victim. This communication may be via e-mail, the internet (standard websites or social networking sites), telephone, fax machines, text messaging, direct mail, flyers, or even face-to-face / door-to-door. But, regardless of the method, if the consumer did not request to be contacted (unsolicited communication) they should immediately be skeptical and suspicious.

Here are several types of scams that could potentially be employed by individuals seeking to prey on both those affected by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and those willing to assist:

Employment Related Scams

Avoid any job offer or volunteer opportunity which guarantees placement, but requires you to pay a fee before you begin. The same should be said for any unsolicited job offers that ask the applicant to pay for training in order to qualify for certain positions. Scammers may ask for fees of as much as \$450 to prepare potential employees for work, when in all actuality, training for shoreline cleanup, boom laying, or skimming is being done by BP, or its contractors, and is free. The only training that is not being paid for by BP is the 40-hour HAZWOPER (Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response) training, and it is only required of supervisors or boat captains.

Potential job seekers should also avoid recruitment efforts by businesses that are not connected to BP or the firm's contractors. These individuals may ask for your personal information to help facilitate their "phishing" scheme. No credible employer needs your bank account information, or credit card and debit card numbers to interview or hire you. Providing them with this type of information could compromise your identity and make you vulnerable to identity theft.

- [FTC Warns of Oil Spill Job Scams](#)
- [Florida Gulf Recovery Jobs](#)
- [Volunteer Opportunities](#)

Charity Scams

These scams tend to be the most common following a disaster. To check to see if the charity is registered to solicit funds in Florida, visit our [online Gift Givers' Guide](#).

Consumers should also be cautious of emails that claim to show pictures of the disaster areas or affected wildlife. These attached files may contain viruses. Only open attachments from known senders.

Claims-Related Scams

Consumers are cautioned not to waive any rights or sign settlement documents from any companies or corporations until the full extent of their loss can be determined. These offers may be premature or even fraudulent, as losses may be significantly higher than the money being initially offered.

Beware of individuals posing as government officials who require a processing fee to provide government services. All individuals planning to file a claim against BP need to be conscious of the potential fraud risks. Scammers may offer to expedite the processing of claims for a fee. ESIS is BP's authorized claims administrator and they do not charge individuals or companies any fee to process claims. Claims are being accepted from individuals and businesses for property damage, net loss of profits and earnings capacity, subsistence loss and natural resource damage, removal and cleanup costs, cost of increased public services, and net loss of government revenue. BP will also evaluate all claims of bodily injury even though they are not payable under the Oil Spill Pollution Act of 1990. Apparently some people who had to cancel vacations to the Gulf are hoping for compensation as well. Currently, there is no word on whether the company will reimburse consumers who lost money due to canceled vacations.

If you do have a connection to the Gulf (vacation home, business), before filing any claim, you should first call BP's toll-free claim line at 1-800-440-0858 or 1-800-440-0858 to obtain a claim number. This will help avoid delays. You may then be asked to submit your claim to one of [Florida's ten claims offices](#). These offices will help facilitate payment on legitimate and objectively verifiable claims. Please note that although you may be asked, giving your social security number is not a requirement for claims data entry. To report fraud, BP has a toll-free hotline 877-359-6281 or 877-359-6281.

- These offices are open from 8:00 am to 7:00 pm daily.
 - Pensacola, FL. (Escambia County)
3960 Navy Blvd, Suite 16/17
Pensacola, FL 32507
 - Gulf Breeze, FL (Santa Rosa county)
5668 Gulf Breeze Pkwy, Unit B-9
Gulf Breeze, FL 32563
 - Ft. Walton Beach, FL (Okaloosa County)
348 SW Miracle Strip Pkwy, Suite 13
Fort Walton Beach, FL 32548

- Santa Rosa Beach, FL (Walton County)
5008 US Hwy 98W, Unit 6 & 7
Santa Rosa Beach, FL 32459
- Panama City Beach, FL (Bay County)
7938 Front Beach Road
Panama City Beach, FL 32408
- Port St. Joe, FL (Gulf County)
106 Trade Circle, Suite A
Port St. Joe, FL 32456
- Apalachicola, FL (Franklin County)
194 14th Street, Suite 105
Apalachicola, FL 32320
- Crawfordville, FL (Wakulla County)
3010 Crawfordville Highway Suite A and B
Crawfordville, FL 32327
- Marathon, FL (Monroe County)
7885 Overseas Highway
Marathon, FL 33050
- Key West, FL (Monroe County)
3706 N. Roosevelt Blvd, Suite H
Key West, FL 33040

Investment / Stock Scams

Investors should be particularly wary of press releases, spam faxes, or emails from publicly traded companies that include claims of involvement in the Gulf cleanup efforts or contracts with BP. This is often done in conjunction with what are called “pump-and-dump” schemes. In this type of scam, early investors hype the company’s connection to the disaster, enticing new investors to pour in and drive up the price of the company’s stock. The insiders then cash out by dumping their inflated shares. This drives down the price of the company’s stock, leaving the new investors with over-inflated stock. Remember, always exercise skepticism and do your homework before investing.

- [U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission](#)

Contractor Scams

Beware of contractors who require up-front payment for services because they may fail to perform the work or complete the job to the customer's satisfaction. Use only licensed contractors and avoid anyone that uses high pressure sales tactics. Consumers should always require contractors to provide a written contract and estimate detailing the services to be performed, and be wary of anything that sounds "too good to be true," because it probably is.

Remember...the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is your consumer complaint and information resource. Our Consumer Hotline will answer any questions you may have or direct you to the best resource for assistance. If you are calling within Florida simply dial 1-800-HELP-FLA 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352), outside of Florida 850-488-2221 850-488-2221 or en Español 1-800-FL-AYUDA 1-800-FL-AYUDA (352-9832).

Additional Resources

If you have knowledge of fraud, waste, abuse, or allegations of mismanagement involving disaster relief operations, you can also:

- Contact the Disaster Fraud Hotline
1- 866-720-5721 1- 866-720-5721 , disaster@leo.gov
National Center for Disaster Fraud
Baton Rouge, LA 70821-4909