



# FLORIDA CONSUMER NEWSLETTER

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A publication of the Florida Department of  
Agriculture and Consumer Services

## HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS TIPS

Hurricane season begins June 1 and lasts until November 30. There are no areas in Florida immune to the forces of a hurricane. If a hurricane strike becomes imminent, it will be imperative that you are prepared and informed both before and after the storm.

**Have a Family Emergency Plan** – Prior to the threat of a disaster, families can create a personalized Family Emergency Plan at [FloridaDisaster.org/GetaPlan](https://FloridaDisaster.org/GetaPlan). The plan should include steps to take before, during, and after the disaster.

**Have a Fuel Plan** – Surges in consumer demand due to storms can cause disruptions in Florida's fuel distribution system. Early preparation by consumers will reduce the strain on fuel distribution and will help ensure that fuel is available as needed.

**Price-Gouging** – In the wake of a natural disaster, essential commodities may be in short supply. When an executive order is issued by the Governor declaring a state of emergency in Florida, you can call the Florida Attorney General's Price Gouging Hotline at 866-966-7226 to report possible violations.

**Home Repair** – If your home is in need of repair following a storm, check each contractor's address, license, and complaint history by calling the Department of Business and Professional Regulation at (850) 487-1395 or by visiting their website at [MyFloridaLicense.com](https://MyFloridaLicense.com).

**Food Safety** – Keep in mind that the safety of food and water may be negatively impacted by floodwaters and power outages. Get safety tips at [www.fdacs.gov/Divisions-Offices/Food-Safety](https://www.fdacs.gov/Divisions-Offices/Food-Safety).

**Generator Safety** – Portable generators are useful during power outages, but they can also be dangerous. Keep these devices outdoors, away from doors, windows, and vents that could allow carbon monoxide to come indoors.

**Fuel** – The potential for water contaminated fuel incidents increase in areas where a storm has caused flooding. If you witness flooding at a station during or immediately following a storm, call 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352) or, for Spanish speakers, 1-800-FL-AYUDA (352-9832) to report it.

**Insurance** – Call your insurance agent to verify any messages or robocalls you receive about your insurance or insurance premiums after the storm.

**Landlord/Tenant** – If you live in a rental property that is damaged by a storm, you need to know your rights and responsibilities and those of your landlord. Visit Landlord/Tenant Law at [FloridaConsumerHelp.com](https://FloridaConsumerHelp.com) for more information or refer to Florida's Landlord/Tenant Law, [Chapter 83, Part II, Florida Statutes](#).

FDACS is the state's clearinghouse for consumer complaints, protection, and information. If you need assistance with a consumer issue and are not sure who to call, contact the department's consumer protection and information hotline by calling 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352) or, for Spanish speakers, 1-800-FL-AYUDA (352-9832). Visit [FloridaConsumerHelp.com](https://FloridaConsumerHelp.com) to file a complaint, find information on scams, or check out the A to Z Resource Guide.

[www.FloridaConsumerHelp.com](https://www.FloridaConsumerHelp.com)

1-800-HELP-FLA(435-7352) • Mon-Fri, 8a.m. – 5p.m., EST • 1-800-FL-AYUDA(352-9832)

# ADD A FUEL PLAN TO YEARLY HURRICANE PREPARATION

Surges in consumer demand due to hurricanes can cause disruptions in Florida's fuel distribution system. Early preparation by consumers will reduce the strain on fuel distribution. Follow these tips to help ensure that fuel is available as needed:

- Keep all vehicles at least half full during hurricane season.
- Keep at least one vehicle filled with gasoline once the earliest predictions indicate a storm may threaten the state.
- Pre-purchase fuels (LP gas and gasoline) for generators at the start of hurricane season.
- Use gasoline fuel stabilizer to keep gasoline fresh and ready to use when it is needed.
- Properly stored fuels can be safely stored throughout hurricane season, and can be transferred into vehicles for use, should no emergency arise.

Remember Fuel Safety:

- Refill fuel containers on the ground, not in the truck bed or trunk.
- Transport and store fuel **ONLY** in appropriate containers- look for DOT approved containers that close tightly and do not leak.
- **NEVER** store or transport gasoline in milk jugs or open top containers!
- Store fuel in a safe and well-ventilated location.
- Typically fuel containers are color coded for various fuels:
  - o Red containers are intended for gasoline and other highly flammable liquids.
  - o Blue containers are used for storing kerosene.
  - o Yellow containers are used for diesel fuel.
  - o Green containers typically are designed for storing oil.

For more information or to report fuel quality issues before or after a weather event, call 1-800-HELP-FLA (English) or 1-800-FL-AYUDA (Spanish) or visit [FloridaConsumerHelp.com](http://FloridaConsumerHelp.com).



# TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE

Cristina Miranda, Consumer Education Specialist, FTC

Social media feeds are flooded with ads offering steep discounts on brand-name products, including luxury items. But are these offers real or a scam? When a low-priced “deal” pops into your socials, take a closer look before you buy. Here’s why.

Scammers often [impersonate real companies](#) on social media, offering what seems like an incredible deal for brand-name products at super low prices. But if you buy, you might not get what you ordered: you might get a knock-off...or nothing at all.

To avoid these scams, walk away from ads that promise something expensive at bargain basement prices. But if you’re still interested in the product and need to find out more:

- **Research the seller outside the platform.** Search the name of the seller plus words like “scam,” “complaint,” or “review.” Use a search engine, though, not the social media site. See if others have had problems with that retailer.
- **Compare prices.** What does that product sell for other places? Is it ever that deeply discounted? If not, what are the chances this is a real deal? Slim to none.
- **Read the terms of the deal.** Check out the seller’s website to find out about warranties, return policies, shipping times, and cost? How will you contact the company if you have questions or a problem? If you can’t find this information, walk away.
- **Pay by credit card.** You get the most protection when you pay with a credit card. If you don’t get what you ordered, [dispute the charge](#).

And, never buy anything from online sellers who insist you only pay with [gift cards](#), [wire transfers](#), [payment apps](#) like Apple Pay, CashApp, PayPal, or Zelle, or [cryptocurrency](#). That’s a sign of a scam. Report it to the FTC at [ReportFraud.ftc.gov](#).

**Scams on Social Media**

Unusually low prices for brand-name products?

That’s a sign of a scam.

FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION

The infographic features a blue background with a light purple central area. On the left is a red shopping bag with white polka dots. On the right is a green sneaker with a yellow price tag. A red warning triangle with a white exclamation mark is positioned below the text. The FTC logo is at the bottom center.

# SPAM TEXTS AND EMAILS

Andrew Rayo, Consumer Education Specialist, FTC

Another day, another round of spam texts and emails trying to sell you things. At best, spam is annoying. At worst, it's pushing scams or trying to install malware on your device. If you're tired of getting spam, there are some ways to help.

When scammers send [spammy messages](#) that seem legit (but aren't), they're often trying to trick you into clicking links and giving them personal or financial information. Things like your passwords or bank account and Social Security numbers are valuable to scammers. With that access to your accounts, scammers could try to steal your money or [your identity](#). Or both.

To help you cut down on spam and avoid scams:

- **Use filters.** Your mobile phone probably has options to [filter and block](#) texts from unknown senders. Some wireless providers and call blocking apps can also help block unwanted messages. Many popular email providers (like Gmail) have strong [spam filters](#) turned on by default. But if any spam gets into your inbox, mark it as [spam or junk](#).
- **Protect your personal information.** Before you enter personal information on a website, email, or text chain, stop. Ask yourself: Why do they need this information? And what's going to happen to it? Remember, too: never share your Social Security number with someone who reaches out to you.
- **Unsubscribe from unwanted emails.** Getting fewer unwanted emails helps you avoid clicking on links that can lead to a [phishing attack](#).
- **Report unwanted messages.** Unwanted messages often lead to scams. Report them. Use your phone's "report junk" option or forward unwanted texts to [7726 \(SPAM\)](#) and unwanted emails to your [email provider](#).

Learn more about how to get fewer [spam texts](#) and [emails](#). If you spot a scam, report it to the FTC at [ReportFraud.ftc.gov](#).



FEDERAL TRADE  
COMMISSION

## Get an unexpected text or email?



**Avoid a scam:**

**Don't click any links**



# BED BUG AWARENESS

Bed bugs are a real-life issue that affect 1 in 5 Americans and growing. The Center for Disease Control (CDC), United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) classify bed bugs as a public health pest, like mosquitoes and ticks. Their itchy bites can last for weeks, and they have the potential to cause severe allergic reactions. Bed bugs cost over \$600 million a year and average \$1,000 per home to control in the United States. Due to their importance and for choosing effective treatment methods, it is vital to know how to correctly identify a bed bug. Bed bug awareness week is June 2-8, 2024, and this article will cover bed bug identification and how to tell the difference between other pest look-alikes.



Image 1: Bed bug adult

Bed bugs look like flat ticks but have six legs. They are oval, brown and can get up to the size of an apple seed. They usually live in their own filth so look for their excrement and shed skins, especially in the seam of the mattress or under the mattress tag. Bed bugs are most active from midnight to 5 am and shy away from movement by staying hidden.



Image 3: Adult carpet beetle

Adult carpet beetles are oval-shaped and can appear to be bed bug look-alikes in color and size. However, they have a hard outer shell or exoskeleton, and their head is clearly separated from the thorax unlike bed bugs which are very soft bodied and their head and thorax look fused together. These small pests feed on fabrics, furs, wools, feathers, and leather. Despite their name, they do not eat the synthetic materials of today's carpet.



Image 2: Cockroach nymph

Cockroach nymphs are often confused with bed bugs because of their similar coloring and because as immatures, they haven't developed their wings which also leads people to confuse them with bed bugs. They have a flattened, oval appearance, very long antenna, and long bristly legs whereas bed bugs do not have long antennae or bristly legs. Cockroach nymphs thrive in moist areas where food is prepared or stored unlike bed bugs which are found where humans commonly rest or sleep like the bed or couch.



Image 4: Adult tick

Ticks are blood-sucking pests like bed bugs and they can resemble each other until you look closely. The key difference is that bed bugs are insects with six legs and adult ticks are arachnids having eight legs. Ticks attach to humans, pets, livestock, and wild animals. They are most commonly found attached to their host or outdoors in moist, shady areas with overgrown vegetation. Occasionally a tick may be found indoors after being brought inside but infestations indoors are rare, unlike bed bugs which are only found indoors associated with humans.

Find out more about bed bug biology, their prevention, and control here: <https://www.fdac.gov/Consumer-Resources/Health-and-Safety/Protect-Your-Home-from-Pests/Bed-Bugs>.

# ABOUT THE FDACS DIVISION OF CONSUMER SERVICES

FDACS is Florida's state consumer protection agency responsible for regulating charities and handling consumer complaints. FDACS handles more than 400,000 consumer complaints and inquiries, oversees more than 500,000 regulated devices, entities, and products like gas pumps and grocery scales, performs over 61,000 lab analyses on products like gasoline and brake fluid, performs nearly 9,000 fair ride inspections, and returned over \$2.8 million to consumers through mediations with businesses.



The Division of Food Safety monitors food from the point of manufacturing and distribution through wholesale and retail sales to ensure the public of safe, wholesome and properly represented food products.

**CLICK THE ICON ABOVE TO SEE THE LATEST RECALLS, MARKET WITHDRAWALS, & SAFETY ALERTS.**



The Consumer Product Safety Commission provides consumer product recall information as part of the agency's mission to protect consumers and families from hazardous products.

**CLICK THE ICON ABOVE TO SEE THE LATEST RECALLS, MARKET WITHDRAWALS, & SAFETY ALERTS.**

*The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is the state's clearinghouse for consumer complaints, protection and information. Consumers who would like information about filing a complaint against a business or who believe fraud has taken place can visit us online at [FloridaConsumerHelp.com](https://www.floridacconsumerhelp.com) or contact the department's consumer protection and information hotline by calling 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352) or 1-800-FL-AYUDA (352-9832) for Spanish speakers.*