

WEATHERING THE STORM:

Financial Tips and Resources for Hurricane Recovery



GULF COAST EDITION: Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

- Federal Government assistance may be available. To apply, you may register through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) by phone at **800-621-3362**, **TTY 800-462-7585**, or at www.fema.gov.
- If you are in a declared disaster area and are the victim of a disaster, you may be eligible for financial assistance from the U.S. Small Business Administration - even if you don't own a business. As a homeowner, renter and/or personal-property owner, you may apply to the SBA for a loan to help you recover from a disaster. For more information, call **800-659-2955** or visit www.sba.gov/services/disasterassistance.

INSURANCE

Contact your insurance company. Notify your insurance company of your loss and get advice about making emergency repairs. If you are unable to live in your home, ask the insurance company if it will pay for living expenses, such as a motel and food.

- A list of insurance companies can be found at: www.disasterinformation.org, or www.iii.org/prepare/resources/:
 - For Alabama call **800-433-3966** (in state) or **334-269-3550** (not toll free) or visit www.aldoi.gov;
 - For Florida call **877-693-5236** (in state) or **850-413-3030** (out of Florida, not toll free);
 - For Louisiana call **800-259-5300** or **225-342-5900** (in Baton Rouge, not toll free);
 - For Mississippi call **800-562-2957** (in state) or **601-359-2453** (out of Mississippi, not toll free);
 - For Texas, call **800-252-3439**.
- Flood insurance: If you don't know the insurer or administrator, call the National Flood Insurance Program at **800-427-4661**.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

- Unemployment Insurance:
 - Alabama residents, call **866-234-5382** or visit www.dir.alabama.gov/uc/ICCS;
 - Florida residents, call **800-204-2418** or visit www.fluidnow.com;
 - Louisiana residents, call **866-783-5567** or **800-818-7811**;
 - Mississippi residents, call **888-844-3577**;
 - Texas residents, call **800-939-6631** or visit www.twc.state.tx.us/ui.
- Disaster Unemployment Assistance may also be available for self-employed and newly employed people who are ineligible for Unemployment Insurance. Use the applicable phone number under Unemployment Insurance.

OTHER BENEFITS

- Social Security: available at local Social Security offices. For locations, call **800-772-1213** or visit www.socialsecurity.gov.
- Veterans Benefits and Compensation: call U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs at **800-827-1000** or visit www.vba.va.gov.
- Direct Deposit: If you do not already receive your Federal benefits by direct deposit, you should consider doing so. Direct deposit means that your benefits are electronically sent to your bank or credit union account. Direct deposit is safer, faster and more reliable than receiving a check by mail. To register or for more information, call **800-333-1795** or **800-333-1792**, or visit www.godirect.org.

DEBT

- Call your creditors. Many will defer your loan payments, waive late fees, or raise your credit limit temporarily.
- If you need help identifying your creditors you can do so by getting your free credit report at **877-322-8228** or visit www.annualcreditreport.com.

BANK AND CREDIT UNION ACCOUNTS

- For information about accessing bank accounts, lost records, ATM cards, direct deposits or how to reach your bank, call the FDIC at **877-275-3342** or visit www.fdic.gov.
- For information about credit unions, call **703-518-6300** (not toll free) or visit www.ncua.gov.
- Banks and credit unions keep extensive back-up records to ensure that customer account information is accurate and protected.
- Banks and credit unions generally have their computer systems operating so customers can access their money through debit and ATM cards, even if the physical office is damaged or closed.
- Most safe deposit boxes are located in fireproof and waterproof areas. If possible, contact the branch or office where your box was located to determine the condition of your box.

RECONSTRUCTING FINANCIAL AND TAX INFORMATION

- For past year tax returns: call **866-562-5227** or **800-829-1040** or visit www.irs.gov.
The IRS can also answer other questions about tax payments, filing, and other issues.
- Credit Report: You can request a free credit report. Call **877-322-8228** or visit www.annualcreditreport.com.

BUDGET

It is a good idea to develop a budget for the months ahead. Some things to include in a budget are:

- Housing (security deposit, monthly rent),

- Transportation (bus, subway or car),
- Communications expenses (phone, cell, fax), and
- Work related equipment/other costs.
- Free resources may be available for food, clothing and furniture. Explore these options first.

10 TIPS FOR AVOIDING SCAMS

- 1** – Before you give out your personal information (Social Security number, date of birth, FEMA case number), make sure it is absolutely necessary and that the person asking for it represents a legitimate organization (such as a government agency or charity).
- 2** – Avoid “officials” who ask for payments for government benefits. No government agency charges application fees for disaster relief benefits.
- 3** – Always keep critical personal information and documents in a safe place.
- 4** – Don’t give out your checking account number over the phone unless you know the company and understand why the information is necessary.
- 5** – Don’t pay in advance for offers of housing.
- 6** – Avoid offers for loans or credit cards that require payment in advance.
- 7** – For home repairs, ask for references and referrals.
- 8** – For home repairs, get more than one estimate in writing. Don’t pay the full amount for the work until the work is completed and you’re satisfied.
- 9** – Pest control or water purification offers may not provide real services. Check these out before accepting offers, even for “free” tests or services. Read the “fine print” and get a second opinion.
- 10** – If an offer sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

If you believe you may be a victim of identity theft, contact the fraud departments of any one of the three major credit bureaus at their toll-free numbers to place a “fraud alert” on your credit file: Equifax at **888-766-0008**, Experian at **888-397-3742**, or TransUnion at **800-680-7289**. This can help prevent a

thief from opening new accounts or making changes to your existing accounts.

For more information about guarding against identity theft and resolving problems, visit www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/microsites/idtheft.

OTHER RESOURCES

- For a variety of free federal government publications related to financial issues, call **1-888-MyMoney (1-888-696-6639)** or visit www.MyMoney.gov.
- For other federal government resources, visit www.usa.gov.
- Look in the blue pages (government section) of your local telephone book for state and county offices of emergency assistance.

Compiled from: American Red Cross, Federal Emergency Management Agency and National Endowment for Financial Education, California Society of Enrolled Agents, Federal Deposit Insurance Corp., Federal Trade Commission, Home Builders Association of Alabama, Internal Revenue Service, and National Credit Union Administration, by the Office of Financial Education. Updated May 2009. Gulf Coast Version.