

Avoiding Scams following Hurricane Florence

This is a release from Anson County Sheriff Landric Reid: As communities like ours here in Anson County begin the process of cleaning up after Hurricane Florence, I urge you to be aware of criminals who will seize this opportunity to prey on our citizens. Many people, especially the elderly, can become victims of scams following a natural disaster.

As people return home to assess the damage from Hurricane Florence, it is common for scammers to show up to take advantage of citizens because they know reputable contractors will be overwhelmed with work. There are often three different types of fraudulent activity that is common following a natural disaster: home repair scams, price gouging, and charity scams.

As your Sheriff, I urge you to keep these important tips in mind before hiring someone to undertake repairs to your home or property:

- Always get the estimate in writing.
- Consider getting multiple estimates.
- Ask for references.
- Avoid paying money up front.
- Resist all attempts that force you to make an on-the-spot decision.
- Never pay in cash.
- Use local contractors, even if this means being placed on a waitlist.
- Make sure the contractor is insured.

Home repair scams are common following a disaster such as Hurricane Florence. This form of scam often involves questionable contractors going door to door, offering to do work at low prices in exchange for a deposit. Once the deposit is obtained, the contractor never returns to complete the work. Please remember the tips above to avoid becoming a victim of home repair scams.

Also, be aware there is a greater potential for price gouging following a natural disaster. Price gouging occurs when an individual charges excessive prices for goods or services during a state of emergency. Price gouging is also prohibited by law and civil penalties may apply to individuals engaged in this type of unscrupulous activity.

Finally, please be aware that people pretending to work for charitable organizations may also be fraudulently soliciting donations. Here are a few tips to avoid the fake charity scam:

- Donate only to charities you know and trust.
- Do not give out any personal or organizational information.
- Do not give or send cash to any organization.

The citizens of Anson County must be aware that there is a greater potential for scams following a natural disaster, and you should therefore be extremely cautious when choosing contractors to make repairs, or when donating money to individuals claiming to be a charity.

If you have a price gouging or home repair scam complaint, please contact the North Carolina Department of Justice toll-free at 1-877-5-NOSCAM or file a complaint online at www.ncdoj.gov/gouging. You may also contact the United States Department of Justice, National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDP), to report fraudulent activity. NCDP can be reached toll-free at 877- 623-3423, or via email at disaster@leo.gov.

Wildlife Commission Anticipates Seasonal Increase in Coyote Sightings

Data collected by the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission about human-coyote interactions in 2017 suggest North Carolinians may expect to see — and hear — coyotes with greater frequency in October and November.

“Biologically this makes sense. In the fall we see young, ‘teenaged’ coyotes leaving their parents’ territory to find a mate and establish a territory of their own,” said Falyon Owens, Extension wildlife biologist with the Commission. “Early in their wandering, young coyotes often travel with their siblings, and their characteristic yipping, howling and barking may be heard as they keep track of each other, and other coyotes whose territories they are passing through.”



These data are part of a larger dataset of animal-wildlife interactions reported to the Commission through its Wildlife Interaction Hotline since early 2017. Reports range from positive wildlife experiences and sightings to complaints. The Commission uses this information to guide outreach and management efforts.

In 2017, the greatest number of coyote-related reports occurred during the fall, with most reports coming from Wake (18), Mecklenburg (16) and Gaston (15) counties in the October-November timeframe. Coyotes are common in all 100 counties in North Carolina, but these areas are densely populated, so the chances of someone seeing a coyote are increased.

“Young, dispersing coyotes can travel remarkable distances - upward of 300 miles — before settling into their own territory,” Owens said. “That’s like walking from Asheville to Jacksonville. These young individuals are exploring new ground, so they’re more likely to be noticed by people.”

Human-Coyote Interactions Reported to Commission During the 2017 peak for coyote reports (October-November), the Commission received the most reports from the following counties: Wake 18; Mecklenburg 16; Gaston 15; New Hanover 12; Iredell 7; Forsyth 7; Cumberland 6; Unkown 6; Orange 5; and Brunswick 5.

Coyotes usually are wary of people and avoid human contact, according to Owens. Hazing, or standing your ground and shouting, waving, or throwing small objects can be an effective way to ensure these wild animals develop and maintain a healthy fear of humans.

“Coyote attacks on people are rare,” Owens said. “The highest risk from coyotes in neighborhoods is associated with unsupervised small pets - especially outdoor cats - so we advise people to keep their cats indoors and their dogs, particularly small dogs, on a leash when outside, or in a fenced area.”

To deter coyotes and other undesired wildlife from residential areas, Owens suggested removing food attractants such as unsecured garbage, pet food and bird feeders.

“In the absence of attractants, they will likely still pass through the area, but won’t make themselves at home,” Owens said. “Combined with active hazing, this can send the message to coyotes that they are unwelcome. You can effectively intimidate a coyote by throwing small objects toward it, making loud noises, or spraying it with a water hose.”

Wary and Wily Coyotes - What You Should Know Other suggestions to prevent conflicts with coyotes include:

- Use trash and recycling bins that have tight-fitting lids or lids that can be secured;
- Feed pets indoors or remove food when your pet is finished eating outside;
- Use bird feeders that keep seed off the ground and clean the area when birdseed accumulates on the ground;
- Clear brush along the edges of your yard;
- Remove fallen fruit from around fruit trees; and,
- Educate your neighbors about coyotes and best practices to minimize conflicts with them.

For more information about coyotes in North Carolina, visit the Wildlife Commission’s N.C. Coyote page on its website (www.ncwildlife.org/coyote), or call the Commission’s N.C. Wildlife Helpline toll-free at 866-318-2401. The call center is open Monday through Friday (excluding holidays) from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.



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