

OFFICE OF THE
DISTRICT ATTORNEY
COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

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District Attorney



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******* PRESS RELEASE *******

District Attorney Joyce E. Dudley, today reminded the people of Santa Barbara County to be vigilant in responding to crimes committed by thieves who attempt to profit from the Thomas Fire.

Such thieves could engage in a variety of crimes including: illegal price gouging, charitable solicitation fraud and contractor fraud.

Price Gouging

California law generally prohibits businesses and individuals from raising prices for 30 days after an emergency declaration.

As it relates to the Thomas Fire, Governor Brown declared a state of emergency in Santa Barbara County on December 5, 2017.

Under Penal Code section 396, it is illegal to charge a price for essential goods and services that is more than 10 percent higher than the price charged immediately before the emergency declaration. If a business does so they could be guilty of the crime communally known as price gouging.

This statute applies to hotels/motels, consumer food items, goods or services used for emergency cleanup, emergency supplies, medical supplies, home heating oil, contractor's services, building materials, housing, transportation, freight, storage services, gasoline, and other motor fuels.

Price gouging is subject to criminal prosecution and carries a penalty of up to one year in county jail and a fine of up to \$10,000. Violators may also face civil enforcement actions and penalties.

District Attorney Dudley stated, "Amongst the most generous members of our communities have always been our local businesses who have historically shown great compassion for those affected by disasters. But," Dudley cautioned, "If any predator business criminally misuses this disaster for their own benefit, we will prosecute them to the full extent of the law".

Fraudulent Charitable Solicitation

District Attorney Dudley also cautioned the people of Santa Barbara County to be aware of unfamiliar individuals or organizations soliciting funds in support of disaster victims. "My advice is that you only give money to charities and relief organizations with which you are familiar and whose proper contact information can be verified."

Fraudulent Contractors

Additionally, District Attorney Dudley wanted to warn the People of Santa Barbara County, as well as potential fraudulent contractors, about Penal Code 670.

“Penal Code section 670,” stated DA Dudley, “is a special allegation attached to other crimes and codes applicable to *anyone* offering any repairs relating to a natural disaster.”

In conclusion Dudley stated, “Your District Attorney’s Office proudly stands with your other public safety partners in seeking to protect you, your loved ones, and your property. None of which would be possible without the extraordinary cooperation and leadership we have experienced from our remarkable and resilient community; a community we are continuously honored to protect and serve.”

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