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National Consumer Protection Week

National Consumer Protection Week (NCPW), a nationwide consumer education campaign, is March 3-9, 2019. Commissioner Nikki Fried and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services are encouraging consumers to take full advantage of their consumer rights, learn to spot fraud, and make better informed decisions.

In recognition of NCPW, the Division of Consumer Services will host a free webinar on March 8, 2019, from 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. (EST), titled FDACS: Making a Difference for Florida's Consumers. The webinar will highlight the division's role in registering businesses and ensuring that they comply with their statutorily mandated requirements. It will also clarify the consumer complaints mediation and enforcement process, the fair rides inspection process, the division's role in tackling the use of credit card skimmers at gas station pumps and provide information on various other consumer protection topics. Consumers can register for the webinar by visiting www.FloridaConsumerHelp.com.

The Division of Consumer Services is the state's clearinghouse for consumer complaints, information and protection. The division regulates various businesses, such as motor vehicle repair shops, charitable organizations, pawnbrokers, health studios, sellers of travel, intrastate movers, professional surveyors and mappers, sweepstakes/game promotions and telemarketers. In addition, the division protects consumers and businesses from unfair and unsafe business practices across a wide range of market sectors, including gasoline, brake fluid, antifreeze, liquefied petroleum gas, amusement rides, and weighing and measuring devices.

General Scam Prevention Tips for Consumers

Scams come in all shapes, sizes, and levels of sophistication. However, they all share the common goal of identifying a victim's points of vulnerability and exploiting them to make money. Scammers are either trying to get directly to their victim's money, or they are after the victim's identity to set up fraudulent accounts. Either way, the victims are the ones who pay the price.

As consumers, we must be careful about the messages to which we respond and vigilant about protecting our personal information. Being informed and aware are our best defenses against scammers. Here are a few simple tips that can help consumers avoid becoming a victim:

- Be skeptical of any unsolicited personal contact, telephone calls, letters, emails, or social media messages.
- Do not use the telephone numbers, email addresses, or website addresses provided in an unsolicited contact to verify the validity of the information provided. Independently verify contact information through several sources before responding.
- Get details in writing before signing agreements, sending money, or giving financial information.
- Do not respond to high pressure tactics. Take the time to verify information and seek counsel from family, friends, or trusted professionals.
- Be wary of anyone requesting payment through money transfer, money order, or by sending cash or gift cards.
- Avoid using debit cards whenever possible. Purchases made by credit card will allow a consumer the ability to dispute charges.
- Check a company's complaint history at www.FloridaConsumerHelp.com under "Business/Complaint Lookup," or by calling 1-800-435-7352. If the business is regulated by FDACS, be sure to find out if they are registered.
- Use "Check-A-Charity" at www.FloridaConsumerHelp.com or call 1-800-435-7352 to verify a charity's registration status and to check their financial information.

For additional information, contact the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services at 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352), 1-800-FL-AYUDA (352-9832) en Español or visit www.FloridaConsumerHelp.com

National Surveyors Week

FDACS licenses and regulates Florida's professional surveyors and mappers through the Florida Board of Professional Surveyors and Mappers. National Surveyors Week celebrates the surveying profession and educates the public on the role the surveyors play in our nation. This year National Surveyors Week is being observed March 17-23.

Licensed surveyors and mappers make exact measurements and determine property boundaries. They provide data relevant to the shape, contour, gravitation, location, elevation or dimension of land or land features on or near the earth's surface for engineering, mapmaking, mining, land evaluation, construction, archeological and other purposes.

Surveying dates to the beginning of recorded history. There is historical data showing that the ancient Egyptians used surveying methods in the building of the Great Pyramid at Giza in 2700 BC and to divide land into plots for the purpose of taxation. Today's surveyors are following in the footsteps of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln, but technological advances have drastically changed the methods and accuracy of surveying and require those in the profession to do everything from flying a drone to managing a geographic information system.

The annual number of retiring surveyors far exceeds the number of those entering the profession. One of the best ways to reverse that trend is to introduce the next generation to the surveying profession and all it has to offer.

National Weights and Measures Week

National Weights and Measures Week, March 1-7, is a great time to highlight the skill and expertise of the inspectors with the department's Bureau of Standards.

FDACS inspectors check the scales at grocery stores and perform net content inspections of packaged goods. Anything sold by weight is subject to inspection and review. Additionally, the

department conducts price verification inspections at retailers to make sure that the shelf price matches the register price.

FDACS inspectors also test fuel dispensers to ensure that when you pay for a gallon of fuel, you receive a gallon of fuel. Inspectors test fuel samples to verify that the quality of the fuel meets the manufacturer's requirements for your vehicle. That inspector also checks fuel pumps for illegal credit card skimmers.

FDACS inspectors perform safety checks at large capacity propane storage plants and conduct safety and accuracy inspections on the trucks that deliver the gas to your home. They also check the cylinders used for your gas grills to ensure that you are not only safe but also getting the amount of propane for which you paid.

[Click to View Food Recalls](#)

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 to View Consumer Product Recalls](#)

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.

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is the state's clearinghouse for consumer complaints, protection, and information. Consumers who believe fraud has taken place can 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) or visit us online at FloridaConsumerHelp.com.

Follow us on Twitter -- @FDACS and @NikkiFriedFL



Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Nicole "Nikki" Fried, Commissioner

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