

eFLORIDA CONSUMER NEWSLETTER

435-7352

352-9832

FreshFromFlorida.com / 1-800-HELP-FLA / 1-800-FL-AYUDA

DEPARTMENT HELPS END DEBT RELIEF SCAM

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services worked with the Federal Trade Commission, Florida's Office of the Attorney General and other agencies to stop an expansive debt relief operation that bilked consumers of millions of dollars. Scam artists Jeremy Lee Marcus, Craig Davis Smith, and Yisbet Segrea used 11 business fronts to allegedly promise consumers that their debts would be paid, settled, or dismissed to improve their credit scores. However, the victims did not receive any debt consolidation and were left in critical financial standing.



The scammers offered consumers bogus debt consolidation loans with attractive interest rates. Once the victims agreed to the loan and provided financial information, the scammers withdrew monthly "payments" from their accounts, ranging from \$200 to more than \$1,000, without providing any of the promised services.

Due to the diligence of the FTC, the department, and partnering agencies, the scam artists were charged with violating the FTC Act, the FTC's Telemarketing Sales Rule, and the Florida Deceptive and Unfair Trade Practices Act.



MOBILE MECHANICS

Have you ever stopped at the local auto parts store and had someone in the parking lot offer to install the parts or make minor repairs for you? Mechanics performing repairs or minor installations on-site are called "shade tree mechanics" or "mobile mechanics," and they may be operating in violation of Florida law.

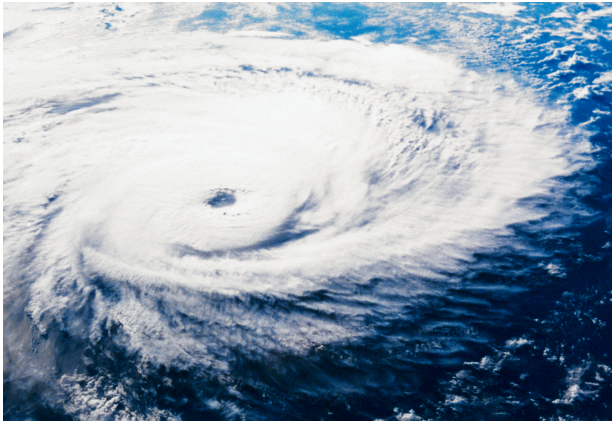
The Florida Motor Vehicle Repair Act requires anyone who is paid to repair motor vehicles owned by other individuals to register with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. The registration requirement extends to individuals without fixed locations, such as those operating out of parking lots.

Motor vehicle repair includes both diagnostic work as well as all maintenance of and modifications and repairs to motor vehicles. This includes, but is not limited to: the rebuilding or restoring of rebuilt vehicles, body work, painting, warranty work and other work customarily undertaken by motor vehicle repair shops.



Subscribe to Commissioner Putnam's weekly email to receive updates about the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services



HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS

Hurricane season begins June 1, and it's imperative to be prepared. Florida has 1,197 miles of coastline, and all of its cities are within 75 miles of the coast. All areas of the state are susceptible to the effects of hurricanes.

Have a Plan – Prior to the threat of a disaster, families can create a personalized Family Disaster Plan at FloridaDisaster.org/GetaPlan. This site provides checklists and important steps to take before, during and after the disaster.

Home Repair - Be cautious of repair businesses or individuals who solicit door-to-door. Check each contractor's address, license and complaint history prior to hiring by calling the Department of Business and Professional Regulation at (850) 487-1395 or visit their website at MyFloridaLicense.com.

Food Safety – Keep in mind that food and water may be contaminated by floodwaters. Get safety tips at FreshFromFlorida.com/Divisions-Offices/Food-Safety.

Generator Safety - Portable generators are useful during power outages, but they can also be dangerous. Carbon monoxide poisoning can occur from generators or grills when they are used indoors, in partially enclosed spaces, or near vents or windows that allow fumes to enter your home.

PET FRAUD

Summer is a great time to adopt a new pet. Unfortunately, some scammers promise a new furry friend only to defraud consumers of hundreds or even thousands of dollars.



According to Fraud.org, in a typical pet sale scam, a consumer will see an advertisement for an animal accompanied by pictures. The seller will usually offer to ship the animal to the new owner's location; however, the scammer doesn't have any pets for sale and is using pictures of animals from the Internet.

Consumers should take the following precautions to avoid falling victim to a pet sale scam:

1. Always meet your future pet in person before paying. Insist on seeing the pet in person. If the seller will not allow this, it's almost certainly a scam.
2. Never wire money for any purchase. Funds cannot be recovered once this kind of transaction is complete. Also, beware of requests to pay by reloadable prepaid card, gift card or other unusual payment methods.
3. Do your research. Websites and postings that scammers use can appear legitimate because they often copy photos and language from reputable breeders.
4. Check references. Do your own due diligence about the background of the seller. A good place to start is the American Kennel Club and the Humane Society of the United States.
5. Don't trust "free pet" offers. Scammers will sometimes use the offer of a "free pet to a good home" to ensnare an adopter into paying for bogus vet bills or fake shipping costs.
6. Make sure their pet shipper is legitimate. Ask for the name and contact information of the shipping company they intend to use. Call to verify that they are legitimate and have a relationship with the breeder.

The Florida Pet Law provides standardized health requirements for dogs and cats being sold or transported. According to the Pet Law, the animal should be examined by a licensed and accredited veterinarian no more than 30 days prior to the sale of the pet. Under certain conditions, it provides buyers with recourses if it is determined that the pet was unfit for sale at the time of purchase.

Consumers or businesses that need information can contact the division's call center, which is staffed with trained analysts who answer questions on almost any topic. The call center can be reached at 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352) or 1-800-FL-AYUDA (352-9832) en Español.