

SPOTLIGHT: PRICE GOUGING

STATE OF EMERGENCY - HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

It can be confusing to know what price gouging is, as well as when it applies to your situation. Price gouging laws come into effect when a State of Emergency is declared. In South Carolina, a State of Emergency is usually declared by: **(1)** the Governor, **(2)** the Attorney General or **(3)** the President. Local governments may declare one as well if a price gouging ordinance is on the books. When a business offers a product or service at a much higher price than the average price of the product or service in the 30 days prior to the State of Emergency, this is price gouging.

ARE YOU A VICTIM OF PRICE GOUGING?

- **State of Emergency.** Has South Carolina's Governor, Attorney General or a local government declared a State of Emergency? If not, has the President declared a State of Disaster for the state?
- **Are You Affected?** A State of Emergency/Disaster can be issued for a specific area such as a county, or for the whole state.
- **Pricing.** Were you charged an unusually high price for a product or service?

If you answered YES to each item in the checklist above, you may be the victim of price gouging. Your next steps are:

- **Keep any Documentation of the Good or Service.** This means keep receipts, estimates, or invoices. The more details you have, the easier it will be to determine if it was indeed price gouging.
- **File a Police Report.** Report the incident to the local police department.

HOW CAN I AVOID PRICE GOUGING?

- **Stock Up.** Buy essential items such as food, water, and fuel before you need them. In the case of bad weather, you typically have some warning so that you can make a last minute trip to the store.
- **Plan Ahead.** Researching products and services you anticipate needing can be helpful. While prices may go up a bit due to supply and demand, a large jump from the estimate/quote you initially receive will give you evidence of price gouging. Find phone numbers for several companies so when you need their service you can compare prices and find the best deal.

For more information on protecting yourself from identity theft, visit www.consumer.sc.gov and click Identity Theft Resources.



REMEMBER:

A State of Emergency/Disaster does have an expiration date; depending on who issues the declaration, it will expire at different times.

Seasonal price changes are not against the law. For instance, hotels typically have different rates depending on the time of year.



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