




GREGORY D. TOTTEN
District Attorney

NEWS RELEASE

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Price Gouging After Declared Emergencies Is Unlawful

VENTURA, California – District Attorney Gregory D. Totten warned Ventura County residents today to beware of unscrupulous individuals who attempt to profit from the recent fires which have devastated our community by engaging in illegal price gouging or charitable solicitation fraud.

California law generally prohibits businesses and individuals from raising prices for 30 days after an emergency declaration. Governor Brown declared a state of emergency in Ventura County on December 5, 2017, related to the Thomas fire. 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, a practice commonly known as price gouging. The law applies to consumer food items, goods or services used for emergency cleanup, emergency supplies, medical supplies, home heating oil, 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 of up to \$5,000 per violation, plus mandatory restitution.

The District Attorney also cautioned residents to be aware of unfamiliar individuals or organizations soliciting funds in support of disaster victims. Residents are cautioned to give money only to charities and relief organizations with which they are familiar and whose proper contact information can be verified, such as via the known organization's website.

“Ventura County businesses historically have shown great restraint and compassion for those affected by disasters. For any who would give in to the temptation to benefit from others' misfortune, we will

take price gouging and charitable solicitation fraud very seriously and will act to ensure these activities are not profitable,” Totten said.

Suspected price gouging can be reported to the District Attorney’s Office by completing a contact form through the website listed above or by calling District Attorney Investigator Cliff Williams at (805) 662-1728.

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The Ventura County District Attorney’s Office is the public prosecutor for the county’s 850,000 residents. The office employs approximately 280 employees including attorneys, investigators, victim advocates, and other professional support staff who strive to seek justice, ensure public safety, and protect the rights of crime victims.

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