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NEWS RELEASE

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District Attorney Warns About Price Gouging

VENTURA, California – District Attorney Gregory D. Totten warned Ventura County residents today to beware of individuals and businesses who attempt to illegally profit from the recent fires by engaging in price gouging. California law generally prohibits businesses and individuals from raising prices immediately after an emergency declaration. Acting Governor Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency in Ventura County following the recent Woolsey and Hill fires. 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.

On January 1, 2019, new limits will be imposed on rental housing. Rent for housing not rented, or offered for rent, within one year prior to the state of emergency declaration is now capped at 160 percent of the fair market rent as established by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. These rates may be found online at <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr.html>. Daily rentals, such as Airbnb and VRBO, are now also subject to price gouging restrictions.

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 prohibition against price gouging will remain in effect until May 31, 2019, and extends to all of Ventura County. County residents may report suspected price gouging by calling the District Attorney's Office at (805) 662-1737.

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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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