



FLORIDA CONSUMER NEWSLETTER

October 2025

A publication of the Florida Department of
Agriculture and Consumer Services

PLANNING TO EVACUATE

State and county officials can issue an order directing the evacuation of specific areas deemed to be in danger. Prepare to leave 24 hours prior to the storm landfall in order to give yourself enough time to evacuate.

Voluntary

Voluntary evacuations may be issued if a tropical storm is approaching or a hurricane is expected pass over your area, and the danger from storm surge may be high. Emergency managers may recommend residents in mobile or manufactured homes or flood-prone areas to evacuate to higher ground or a sturdier shelter.

Mandatory

Mandatory evacuations are ordered when the probability of storm surge is high and could be deadly for residents who don't leave. It is illegal to stay in a home under a mandatory evacuation order. Residents living in a mobile or manufactured home should have a plan to evacuate to a safer location during a mandatory order.

If You Plan To Evacuate...

Prior to evacuation, remember to:

- Maintain a full tank of gas.
- Bring identification, insurance papers and other important documents for every family member.
- Bring adequate water, snacks, cash and medications.
- Obey all special traffic signs and law enforcement orders.

Evacuees Should Be Prepared For...

Traffic may be extremely heavy during a mandatory evacuation. Residents in highly vulnerable areas should leave the area sooner rather than later. Remember there may be limited access to gas stations, restaurants and restroom facilities.



www.FloridaConsumerHelp.com

1-800-HELP-FLA(435-7352) • Mon-Fri, 8a.m. – 5p.m., EST • 1-800-FL-AYUDA(352-9832)

Sheltering

Risk shelters may only have water, snacks and a secure area for you to stay safe during a major storm. Shelters may be crowded and are not designed for comfort. If you evacuate to a risk shelter during a disaster, please bring the following items:

- Toiletries and, if you are sheltering with young children, diapers.
- Prescription medications, identification and any important documents you deem necessary.
- Additional snacks, especially if you have a special diet.
- Blankets, pillows and/or sleeping bags. Accommodations at the shelter will be limited. Books, puzzles or other entertainment that do not require electricity.

For Citizens with Special Needs

According to the Florida Department of Health, a Special Needs Shelter is for “someone who, during periods of evacuation or emergency, requires sheltering assistance due to physical impairment, mental impairment, cognitive impairment or sensory disabilities.” Special needs shelters are designed to meet the needs of persons who require assistance that exceeds services provided at a general population shelter.

If a person lives in a storm surge zone or mobile home, is medically stable but needs help with basic tasks or uses an electronic medical device and has no other evacuation options, they should pre-register for a special needs shelter at [SNR.FLHealthResponse.com](https://www.snr.flhealthresponse.com). All information is confidential and protected under Florida Statutes and must be updated on an annual basis.

Protect Your Pets

Make an inventory of your supplies and review all records so your pet can be safe in the event of a hurricane. Make a kit, including:

- Pet crate
- List of pet-friendly hotels
- Food and water with respective bowls
- Medications with instructions for administering
- Copies of current veterinary records that include your address and phone number in a waterproof bag.
- Leash and collar with rabies tag and ID Picture of your pet
- Small box with litter for cats



DIDN'T REQUEST A PASSWORD RESET?

What keeps many of our online accounts safe from prying eyes or sticky (cyber) fingers? Passwords! Most of us have a plethora of passwords we have to remember, from our social media, shopping, and bank accounts to our network accounts at work. Remembering those are sometimes a task but are definitely a necessity when it comes to security. You know the drill when you forget one and are used to getting the password reset email or text. Lately, however, you may have gotten a password reset message that you did not request. Why did you get it and what should you do?

Those password reset messages are likely a scam. Scammers continue to devise ploys to get us to give up our personal information. In those messages you will usually see a link and possible phone number to contact to reset your password. **DO NOT CLICK ON THE LINK** and don't call that number. The scammer uses these methods to try to get you to give up your real password so they can access your account, which could culminate an account takeover, identity theft, or other identity crimes.

How should you respond to these messages? If you have an account with the company mentioned in the message, log into your account and immediately change your password. If you do not have an account, find a legitimate way to contact the company (remember – do not use the links or numbers in the message) to determine if an account has been created in your name.

Where else should you look for strange activity? It is advisable to check your accounts (Google, social media, Netflix, bank, etc.) for activity you do not recognize. This can usually be done in the settings menu of the account. Delete any devices which are unfamiliar and report any unusual logins or activity. If you see a login from an unfamiliar location, your account has likely been breached. Report the breach and change your password immediately.

What else can you do? Use passkeys for accounts that allow you to do so. A passkey uses a face scan, fingerprint, or PIN as a digital credential that will allow you to sign in without a username or password. It is unique only to you and cannot be stolen. You can also opt for an authenticator application for all your accounts that use multi-factor authentication (MFA); an authenticator app cannot be spoofed in the way phone calls and emails are. If you already have an authenticator app and receive a message from the app to verify log in but you have not attempted a log in, this means the scammer already has your password. Change the password immediately!

If you have antivirus software, run a full scan; if you do not have antivirus software, consider investing in some to keep your personal data safe.

You can file a complaint at with the [Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services](#) and report any scam activity at the [FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center](#).



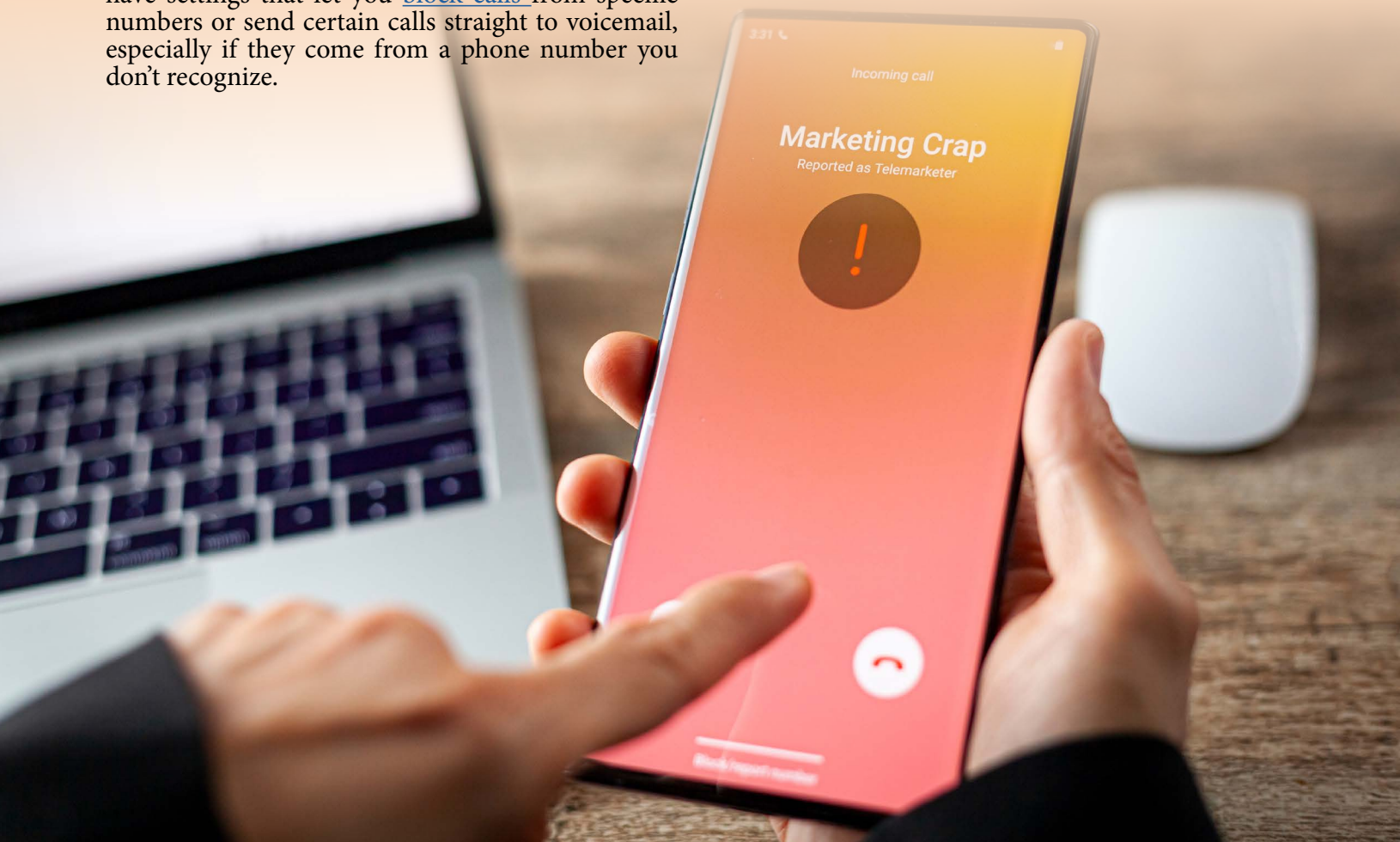
CUT DOWN ON UNWANTED CALLS

If you feel like you get more than your share of unwanted calls, you're not alone. To slow down these persistent calls — some of which lead straight to scams — take a few simple steps.

- **Subscribe to the Florida Do Not Call list.** If you think you have subscribed in the past, [verify](#) your subscription.
- **Register your phone number for free in the National Do Not Call Registry.** Registering will likely cut down how many unwanted calls you get. Unfortunately, it won't stop calls from scammers to your home and mobile phone — and there are still [organizations and groups allowed to call you](#).
- **Hang up on robocalls.** Getting a lot of recorded messages trying to sell you something? Odds are the calls are not legal. Don't press any numbers or call back. Instead, hang up and report them at [DoNotCall.gov](#).
- **File a complaint** to report unsolicited communications with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services at [File a complaint](#).
- **Use your phone's built-in features.** Many cell phones have settings that let you [block calls](#) from specific numbers or send certain calls straight to voicemail, especially if they come from a phone number you don't recognize.

- **Check call-blocking or call-labeling services.** Find out what your phone company offers by contacting their customer service using a phone number or website you know is right. Watch a short video to help you block unwanted calls on your [cell phone](#) or [home phone](#).
- **Research apps to filter calls before downloading.** Some call-blocking apps are free, while others charge. At [ctia.org](#), you can see wireless industry lists of call-blocking apps. See what independent experts are saying and [check the ratings and reviews](#) on your online app store before you decide on a call-blocking app.

Learn more about how to stop unwanted calls at [ftc.gov/calls](#). To learn the latest information on scams and fraud in Florida, visit [Scams and Fraud](#). Florida residents who have placed their residential or mobile telephone number on the Florida Do Not Call list and continue to receive unsolicited or prerecorded sales calls and text messages are encouraged to file a [complaint](#).



FLORIDA'S LEMON LAW

The [Florida Lemon Law, Chapter 681, Florida Statutes](#), affords protections to consumers who purchase a new or showroom vehicle which is found to have nonconformities, which are defects or conditions which considerably impair the use, value, or safety, which have not been corrected by the authorized service agent “within a reasonable number of repair attempts.” The Lemon Law provides for arbitration, if you qualify.

To qualify, the purchase (or lease) must have been made in Florida, and was not for the purpose of resale. The purchase must then meet one of the following requirements:

- the vehicle is used for personal, family or household purposes;
- the vehicle was acquired from the first owner for the same purposes during the first owner's first 24 months of ownership; or
- the owner or lessee is a person who is entitled to enforce the warranty.

Note that the period of protection extends for 24 months after delivery of the vehicle to the first owner, as long as the defects appear and are brought to the manufacturer's attention by the first owner during this 24-month period. That means subsequent buyers are still protected within that time frame as long as the first owner began the process.

During the “Lemon Law Rights Period,” the defect(s) must be reported to the manufacturer or its authorized service agent, which is usually the dealer. The manufacturer has the opportunity to correct the defects; if not corrected following a “reasonable number of attempts,” the consumer can file for arbitration. During arbitration, if the vehicle is deemed a “lemon,” the manufacturer must buy back the vehicle and refund the purchase price or provide a replacement vehicle.

Always keep records of all repairs and maintenance performed and report any issues with the dealer or manufacturer IMMEDIATELY. Ensure the start and end dates on the repairs are correct, and the odometer mileage is documented properly.

The Office of the Attorney General administers the Florida New Motor Vehicle Arbitration Board, and you can read further information on the Lemon Law at [Lemon Law | My Florida Legal](#). The Florida Bar Association has further reading on the law at [Florida's Motor Vehicle “Lemon Law”](#). Both are excellent resources if you feel you have purchased a vehicle that may be subject to the law.

If your vehicle is not a lemon but does need some repairs, make sure you find a repair shop that is properly registered with Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services by searching our [Business License Lookup](#) or by calling 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352). Know your rights as a consumer by visiting [Motor Vehicle Repair / Consumer Rights and Responsibilities](#). In the event you feel a motor vehicle repair shop has not accomplished repairs as it should and your rights are in jeopardy, you can file a complaint [online](#).



OCTOBER IS CYBERSECURITY AWARENESS MONTH

The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) reminds us that October is Cybersecurity Awareness Month. Have you ever wondered, “What is cybersecurity?” According to CISA, cybersecurity is the protection of computer systems and networks from attacks by malicious actors that could cause unauthorized information disclosure, theft, or damage to hardware, software or data. There are likely few areas, if any, of our lives that are not touched by technology and therefore need cybersecurity.

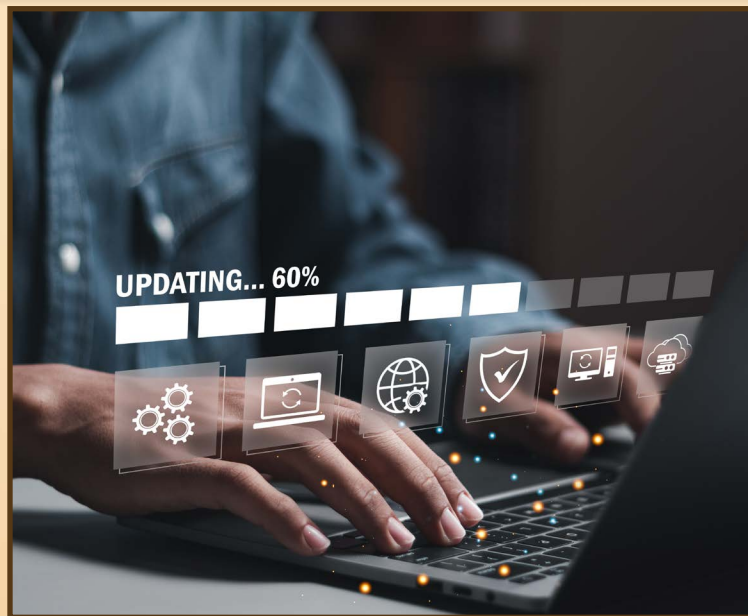
Why Is Cybersecurity So Important?

Cybersecurity protocols are the virtual gatekeeper to sensitive data, networks, and systems we use in multiple aspects of our daily life. Not only does it keep your online accounts safe, but the protocols and best practices put in place by government and businesses are the key to ensuring operations and critical infrastructure are protected.

Stay Safe Online

What can you do to contribute to ensure the safety of your network? Although you have probably heard the same advice before, it is essential to take security seriously and follow through with the actions necessary to stay up to date with your security protocols. The following are four ways to keep your data and network safe.

- **Update software** – This is the easiest way to protect your devices and your applications from current threats. Don't skip that update reminder or schedule it for later – do it now! Or, better yet, enable automatic updates so there is no need to even think about it. Want to check if you have updates pending? Watch out for notifications on your phone or computer, go to the settings on our phone, browser or application and look for updates, or check your browser for any pending alerts.



- **Use strong passwords and a password manager** – What makes a strong password? It needs to be at least 16 characters long, with a mix of upper- and lower-case letters, special characters, and numbers. Consider using passphrases, which consist of five to seven unrelated words. Also, use a unique password for each account and DO NOT reuse passwords. Thinking about using a password manager? That's a step in the right direction, as it will save your passwords for you and complete login credentials, auto-generates strong passwords for you, will notify you of any duplicate passwords or possible password integrity issues, and alerts you if you happen to stumble onto a phishing website. Best of all, it is encrypted to keep your passwords safe from cyberattacks.
- **Turn on multifactor authentication (MFA)** – What is MFA? MFA is an added tier of security, as it involves a second step to verify your identity before allowing access to your account. Be sure to use it on accounts with sensitive personal or financial information, like banks, online shopping, and social media. The most secure is using a physical security key which plugs into your device; others include codes via text or email, and biometrics.

Learn more about how to protect yourself on our website at [Scams and Fraud / Consumer Resources / Home - Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services](#).



ABOUT THE FDACS DIVISION OF CONSUMER SERVICES

FDACS is Florida's state consumer protection agency responsible for regulating charities and handling consumer complaints. FDACS handles more than 400,000 consumer complaints and inquiries, oversees more than 500,000 regulated devices, entities, and products like gas pumps and grocery scales, performs over 61,000 lab analyses on products like gasoline and brake fluid, performs nearly 9,000 fair ride inspections, and returned over \$2.8 million to consumers through mediations with businesses.



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 THE ICON ABOVE TO SEE THE LATEST RECALLS, MARKET WITHDRAWALS, & SAFETY ALERTS.



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.

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The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is the state's clearinghouse for consumer complaints, protection and information. Consumers who would like information about filing a complaint against a business or who believe fraud has taken place can visit us online at [FloridaConsumerHelp.com](https://www.floridacconsumerhelp.com) or contact the department's consumer protection and information hotline by calling 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352) or 1-800-FL-AYUDA (352-9832) for Spanish speakers.