



OFFICE OF THE
DISTRICT ATTORNEY
ORANGE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

TODD SPITZER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRESS RELEASE

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**Orange County District Attorney Establishes
Coronavirus Scam Hotline**
*Businesses are put on notice that price gouging and
other COVID-19 scams are illegal and will be prosecuted*

SANTA ANA, Calif. – The Orange County District Attorney’s Office has established a hotline to report individuals or businesses they suspect of engaging in price gouging or any other COVID-19-related scam.

The Orange County District Attorney Coronavirus Scam Hotline is (714) 834-3482. Reports can also be emailed to reportascam@da.ocgov.com

District Attorney investigators are investigating every report provided to the Orange County District Attorney’s Office regarding a COVID-19 – related scam.

When reporting a suspected scam, members are asked to provide the following information:

- the name of the individual or business they are reporting
- a description of the conduct
- the address or city where the individual or business is located
- a contact number for the person reporting the conduct

The reporting party may remain anonymous, but it is important to provide a contact number as District Attorney investigators may need additional information to investigate the conduct. This information will not be shared outside of the District Attorney’s Office.

During a declared state of emergency, it is illegal for a business to increase its prices for essential goods or services by more than 10 percent, unless they can show their own costs have increased.

Governor Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency in California on March 4, 2020, and the Orange County Board of Supervisors declared a local emergency on February 26, 2020.

“The Orange County District Attorney’s Office is vigorously investigating any and all reports that someone is attempting to illegally profit from the coronavirus threat,” said Orange County District Attorney Todd Spitzer. “This global pandemic has understandably caused widespread anxiety and fear. Exploiting the public’s panic is not a defense to engaging in criminal activity. The County District Attorney’s Office is committed to ensuring that those criminals who break the law and prey on vulnerable victims are held accountable.”

Violations of the price gouging statute are subject to criminal prosecution and can result in one year in county jail and/or a fine of up to \$10,000. Violations are also subject to civil enforcement actions including civil penalties of up to \$5,000 per violation, injunctive relief and mandatory restitution.

The law applies to several products and necessities including: food and drink (including food and drink for animals); emergency supplies such as water, flashlights, radios, batteries, candles, blankets, soaps, diapers, toiletries; and medical supplies such as prescription and nonprescription medications, bandages, gauze, isopropyl alcohol, and antibacterial products.

It is also a misdemeanor for a hotel or motel to increase regular rates by more than 10 percent during a declared emergency and for the 30 days following the state of emergency.

In addition to price gouging, consumers should be on the lookout for other types of scams that are common during emergencies. Criminals may set up fake websites or charities, send emails, texts or post on social media pretending to be from the World Health Organization or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in an attempt to profit illegally. They may also seek donations to help victims of this emergency.

Also, be wary of any business claiming to have a miracle cure. There is currently no cure for coronavirus. Do not allow your fear and anxiety to overtake your common sense.

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