



COUNTY OF FRESNO

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 13, 2020

DA Warns Businesses and Consumers of Price Gouging Law in Wake of Coronavirus

Spiking Prices During a State of an Emergency is a Crime

As the State of California and Fresno County continue to respond to the ongoing threat posed by COVID-19, the Fresno County District Attorney's Office is cautioning businesses and scammers not to take advantage of consumers by price gouging. 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 been increased. Governor Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency in California on March 4.

"Fresno County residents need to know that we stand ready to protect their consumer rights under the law and we will strictly enforce violations related to price gouging." said Chief Deputy District Attorney Scott Hoedt.

Violations of the price gouging statute are subject to criminal prosecution that can result in one-year imprisonment 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 alert for criminals who may set up fake websites, send emails, texts or post on social media pretending to be from the World Health Organization or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to profit illegally. Also, be wary of businesses claiming to have a miracle cure. At present, there is not a cure for the coronavirus. Do not respond to anyone claiming to have a vaccination or cure. Most businesses are honest and have good intentions, but there are always bad actors waiting to take advantage of fear and anxiety.

Price gouging can be reported to the District Attorney's Consumer Protection Unit at (559) 600-3156.