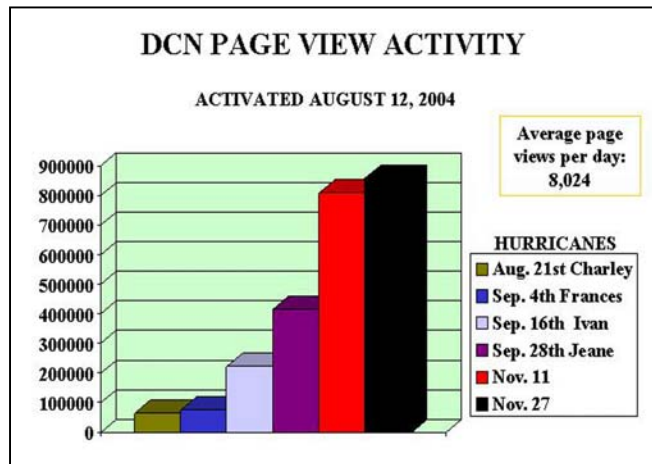




## Disaster Contractors Network: Help Is Just a Click Away.

FEMA 1539-DR-FL 007 (Hurricane Charley) 2004



**Tallahassee, FL.** In a span of 44 days, Florida withstood vicious winds and flooding from Hurricanes Charley, Frances, Ivan, and Jeanne. The entire state was impacted from South Central Florida to the Panhandle. After the storms, families began the daunting task of reconstruction only to find available contractors in short supply.

So where do you go to find a legitimate contractor? The answer's a click away on Florida's new Disaster Contractors Network (DCN) website. The DCN website was activated on Aug.12, 2004, the day before

Hurricane Charley impacted Florida. By Aug. 21, the web page had recorded 65,618 inquiries. After Hurricane Frances on Sept. 4, the accumulated inquiries totaled 77,734. As of Sept. 16, when Ivan struck the Panhandle, the total had climbed to 224,086. Hurricane Jeanne came ashore on Sept. 26, and by then, DCN website inquiries had almost doubled to 416,636. By Nov. 27 the number had climbed to 850,000, averaging more than 8,000 inquiries per day.

The DCN is a public/private partnership between the State of Florida, Florida State University (FSU), various Florida homebuilders associations, and the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Region IV. This partnership, the nation's first pre-disaster and post-disaster network, is funded under FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) administered by the Florida Department of Community Affairs. It builds partnerships within the professional building associations and the FSU Center for Disaster Risk Policy through a link to the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulations.

While homeowners waited patiently for legitimate, licensed contractors to help them rebuild, some illegal contractors knocked on doors offering services, demanding payment in advance, and performing shoddy work. Officials say it's too early to tell how many contractor complaints will result from the four hurricanes.

The DCN site makes it possible to link homeowners with legitimate contractors, address disaster needs, and match needs with available resources. On the Web site, they can find a properly insured roofer, verify a contractor's license, or get a sample contract and other valuable information and guidance. Utilizing the DCN Web site, a better-informed public should be less

apt to fall victim to scam artists and unlicensed contractors willing to take advantage of the situation.

After Hurricane Andrew in 1992, the state tallied more than 16,500 construction and roofing complaints. Strict enforcement of Florida law protects the disaster victim from being victimized again. State investigators are searching for unlicensed contractors, and issuing many citations, each carrying a \$500 fine. Warning signs have been posted stating: “Unlicensed contracting is a felony.” The punishment is up to five years imprisonment. Homeowners who hire an unlicensed contractor may be liable for workmen’s compensation insurance if an accident occurs on the job or a lien may be placed against the property.

Through DCN, contractors can apply for or renew a license, view application status, find exam information, apply for or retake a license exam. DCN also acts as a crucial home base for contractor communications among themselves and with state and federal agencies. Access DCN on line at <http://www.dcnonline.org/>.

Anyone interested in making their properties safer, stronger, and more storm-resistant, can visit the FEMA website [www.fema.gov/fima](http://www.fema.gov/fima) and *Best Practices and Case Studies* [www.fema.gov/fima/bp.shtm](http://www.fema.gov/fima/bp.shtm). The funding source for DCN was HMGP on line at <http://www.fema.gov/fima/hmfp>.

In addition, you can download a copy of Florida’s *Handbook for Hazard Mitigation Projects* from <http://www.floridadisaster.org/BRM> by clicking “BRM Publications” under “Resources” in the sidebar.

Next time you have to face a disaster, you can breathe easier knowing that you have a network that is ready to work with you. The DCN Web site will provide you with the necessary information to avoid becoming a victim, for a second time.



*Mike Hickman, past president, Florida Home Builders Association (FHBA), briefs Mike and Priscilla Brown about Disaster Contractor Network, during FHBA’s “Operation Rebuild” held in Lake Wales, Florida.*

### Project Facts

State: Florida	Project Type: Mitigation
County: Leon	Cost: \$150,000
Funding: HMGP	Average page views:
Hazard: Hurricane	8890 per day
Year: 2004	