

Safe Grilling Tips For The Summer Season

Before firing up the grill keep the following tips in mind for a safe grilling season:

- Check your gas grill for leaks before using your grill for the first time this season. Apply a thick soapy water solution or leak-detection solution around the connection between the propane cylinder and grill hose. Bubbles will form if propane is escaping.
- Both gas and charcoal grills should only be used outdoors in well-ventilated areas. Grilling on porches, in garages or on an apartment terrace should be avoided.
- Coals should be allowed to cool completely before a grill is brought indoors or into a camper to avoid the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Thoroughly clean all cutting boards and surfaces that come in contact with raw food. When preparing foods, use two cutting boards: one for raw meat, chicken, and fish, and one for vegetables or other foods that will not be cooked.
- Keep the top open when lighting a grill.
- Use or store propane cylinders outdoors in an upright/vertical position and away from high temperatures.
- Extinguish all smoking materials and other open flames immediately if gas is smelled.
- Ask the propane vendor to check for any rust, physical damage or metal corrosion on the cylinder.
- Transport cylinders in well-ventilated area of vehicles and drive directly to the destination where it will be used.
- Avoid smoking while handling a propane cylinder.
- Make sure cylinders have an overfill prevention device (OPD), which shuts off the flow of propane before capacity is reached. OPDs are easily identified by their triangular-shaped hand wheel.
- Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds in warm, soapy water before and after preparing foods.
- Check to ensure food is done by inserting a food thermometer at an angle into the thickest part of the meat, chicken, or fish to check the internal temperature.
- Keep cold foods in the refrigerator until serving time.
- Keep hot food hot by using tabletop equipment, such as chafing dishes and sternos.
- Refrigerate leftovers immediately.
- Discard food that has been left at improper temperatures for four hours.



Summer 2012
Update

Freeholder
JOSEPH H. VICARI
Chairman

STEPHEN SCATURRO
Director

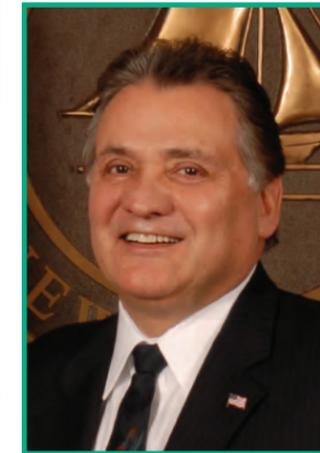


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COUNTY OF OCEAN DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS DIVISION OF WEIGHTS & MEASURES

"We're Watching Over You"



A Message From Joe Vicari: Freeholder Chairman

BEWARE OF TRAVEL "DEALS"

It's that time of year again, when kids are almost out of school and summer vacations are being planned. Vacations are supposed to be carefree times to relax and reconnect with nature, friends and family. However, for consumers who unknowingly book their trips through dishonest travel agents, vacations can be expensive disappointments.

According to the National Association of Attorneys General, travel scams cost consumers \$12 billion annually. Unsuspecting consumers win "free" trips, which may require them to spend most of their vacation in timeshare presentations. "Free" cruises end up costing hundreds of dollars, and a "free" airline ticket

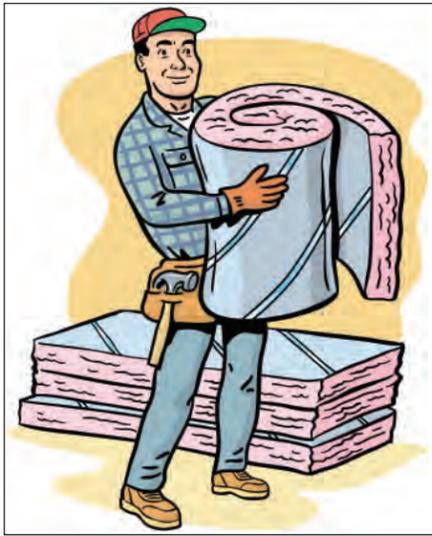
may require purchase of a second ticket at an escalated price.

"Fraudulent companies promote their travel packages through the mail, by phone, unsolicited e-mail or faxes," said Freeholder Joseph H. Vicari. "Vacations represent a real investment of both time and money."

When planning your next vacation, keep the following tips in mind:

- Stay away from travel offers which use high-pressure sales tactics and have deals that sound "too good to be true" because they probably are.
- Do not be pressured into making an uninformed decision or commitment. Remember, a good offer today will be available tomorrow.
- Be extremely suspicious of postcards and telemarketers saying you have been "selected" to receive a "spectacular 'no cost' vacation."
- Seek the advice of a reputable travel agent and verify your arrangements before you pay.
- If it's possible that you won't be able to make the trip, look into travel insurance, so that you won't lose the entire cost of the trip, only an insurance fee.
- Learn travel vocabulary like "blackout periods," dates usually around holidays or peak seasons when you are not entitled to use travel discounts; and "subject to availability," which means you may not be able to get the accommodations you want when you want them.
- Make sure you get all the details about your vacation in writing, especially restrictions, cancellation penalties, refund policies and additional charges like taxes and service fees. If they do not provide it, make sure to request it. Check to be sure these documents reflect the same terms you agreed to.
- Pay by credit card. If you don't get what you paid for, you may be able to dispute the charges with your credit card company. However, don't give your account number over the phone unless you know the company is reputable. Some telemarketers may say they need your account number for identification or verification purposes - they don't. Your account number should only be used to bill you for goods and services.
- Obtain a contact number to verify your travel arrangements prior to your vacation and make sure nothing has changed (i.e., travel times, dates, check-in, air travel, etc.)
- Keep a record. Ask the full name of the travel company and record their contact information. It may also be helpful to get the name of the travel representative who is booking your trip.
- Check out the company before you buy. Contact the Ocean County Department of Consumer Affairs at 732-929-2105 to see if any complaints have been lodged against the travel firm or the travel provider.
- Be aware. Fraudulent businesses often change their name to avoid any associations with past scams.

"Taking these few steps can help to insure your vacation is a memorable time," Vicari said.



HIRING A HOME IMPROVEMENT CONTRACTOR

Yearly, the Ocean County Department of Consumer Affairs receives hundreds of complaints from consumers who are dissatisfied with the work or lack of work done by home improvement contractors they have hired. Complaints range from shoddy workmanship, missed deadlines and a contractor's failure to complete the work or to start the project at all after taking a deposit.

The New Jersey Consumer Fraud Act is designed to protect you from misrepresentation, fraud and deception in consumer transactions, including contracts for home improvement work. In addition, the Contractors' Registration Act requires home improvement contractors to register with the state annually.

Home improvement contractors are individuals and companies involved in repairing, renovating, modernizing, installing, replacing, improving, restoring, painting, constructing, remodeling, moving, or demolishing residential or non-commercial properties.

Examples of work provided by home improvement contractors include residential driveways, sidewalks, swimming pools, terraces, patios, additions, landscaping, fences, porches, windows, doors, cabinets, kitchens, bathrooms, garages, finished basements, basement waterproofing, fire protection devices, security protection devices, central heating and air conditioning equipment, water softeners, heaters, and purifiers, solar heating or water systems, insulation installation, roofing and siding, wall-to-wall carpeting or attached or inlaid floor coverings, to name a few.

"Sometimes taking simple steps can help prevent a consumer from having to deal with a home improvement nightmare," said Freeholder Joseph H. Vicari, Chairman of the Department of Consumer Affairs. He suggested that prior to hiring a home improvement contractor a consumer should:

- Contact Consumer Affairs at 732-929-2105 to see if any complaints have been filed against the contractor and to ensure the contractor is registered.
- Get written estimates from at least three contractors. Ask the contractors how long they have been in business, if they have liability insurance (as required by law), and whether they will be using subcontractors on the project.
- Contact the references your contractor gives you. Ask them whether the job was completed on time, whether there were any unexpected costs, whether the workers showed up on time and cleaned up when they finished, and whether they would use the contractor again.
- Ask your contractor about his or her professional affiliations and confirm the information with those organizations.
- Do not pay for the entire job up front. The customary arrangement is one-third in advance, one-third halfway through the job and one-third upon satisfactory completion and inspection by the town issuing the permit. Do not pay with cash.

Stephen Scaturro, Director of the Department of Consumer Affairs noted that all contracts for home improvement projects costing \$500 or more must be written, include the legal name and business address of the contractor as well as a start date, a completion date, a description of the work to be done, and the total price. The contract must also include the contractor's registration number and the contractor must provide you with a copy of his commercial general liability insurance and the telephone number of the insurance certificate. Scaturro suggests, however, that a contract be obtained no matter what the cost of the project is.

Scaturro also suggests that consumers make sure all warranties and guarantees are in writing, and that the contract states name brands or quality/grades of materials to be used.

Before you sign a contract, ask for a lien waiver. A lien waiver is a receipt that states the workers and material suppliers will not ask you for money once you have paid the contractor. Beware if a contractor asks you to sign a statement that says you will cover the costs of materials and labor if the contractor does not pay.

Signed contracts may be canceled by a consumer for any reason before midnight of the third business day after you receive a copy of the contract. Put the cancellation in writing and either personally deliver it to the contractor or send it registered or certified mail, return receipt requested. A photocopy of your cancellation should also be sent via regular first-class mail.

Keep in mind that even if you hire a home improvement contractor all responsibility falls on your shoulders if any laws are broken. Ensure that all applicable construction permits are obtained from the local municipality. If you are applying for the permit yourself, provide the contractor's name and license in the permit application. Do not say that you are performing the work yourself if you are in fact using a contractor as you may be forfeiting the protections afforded by law.

In order to file a complaint contact the Ocean County Department of Consumer Affairs at **732-929-2105** or visit our website at <http://www.co.ocean.nj.us/Consumer/index.htm> and fill out the complaint form found at the bottom left-hand side of the page.

ABC'S OF POOL SAFETY

According to the National Spa & Pool Institute statistics show that drowning and swimming accidents are best prevented by adult supervision, public awareness programs including water safety training for young children, and not drinking alcohol while swimming, diving or soaking. Statistically, most accidents involving drowning or severe injury occur to children under 5 years of age who are unsupervised, cannot swim, and fall into a pool or pool cover with water on top. Toddlers at the age of 2 or 3 are most likely to wander off from a parent's supervision.



Drowning is NOT accompanied by loud noise or splashing sounds.

DROWNING IS SILENT!

Following the simple ABC's can help prevent a drowning.

A = ADULT SUPERVISION

- Assign an adult to supervise children in and around the swimming pool and spa. This is needed whether there is one parent or guardian present or numerous adults present such as during a family event or party.
- Maintain constant eye-to-eye supervision with children in and around the swimming pool and spa.
- Remove children from the swimming pool and spa area for any distraction such as a telephone call, use of restroom, etc.
- Floaties or other inflatable flotation devices are not life jackets and should never be substituted for adult supervision.
- Ensure any adult responsible for the children know the emergency services telephone number and also your location address in the event emergency personnel are needed to be called to the scene.

B = BARRIERS

- Have a fence enclosure that isolates your swimming pool and spa from the home, play areas, front and side yards and the neighbor's yard.
- Make sure all gates in the isolation fence are self-closing and self-latching.
- Multiple layers of barriers isolating the pool and spa from children should be installed. In addition to an isolation fence, one or more of the following safety features can provide the additional protection necessary:
 1. Approved swimming pool and spa safety cover
 2. Approved swimming pool and spa alarm
 3. Exit alarms on doors providing access to the swimming pool and spa
 4. Keep all doors and windows leading to the swimming pool and spa area locked

C = CLASSES

- Learn how to perform Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR).
- Enroll your child in swimming lessons.

To prevent child-drowning, there is NO substitute for parental supervision.