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**McCOLLUM TOURS STATE EMERGENCY RESPONSE CENTER, PRESENTS
\$555,000 TO FLORIDA DISASTER RECOVERY FUND**

~ With hurricane season approaching, Attorney General encourages
Floridians to prepare in advance ~

TALLAHASSEE, FL - Attorney General Bill McCollum today joined officials with the State Emergency Operations Center to tour the new emergency response center in Central Florida and to present a check for \$555,000 to the Florida Disaster Recovery Fund. The check, which consisted of settlement funds from a previously resolved case, will go toward the Fund's core mission of meeting the long-term recovery needs for Florida disaster victims. The Attorney General reminded Florida consumers that, with the 2008 Hurricane season only days away, early preparation is key to avoiding disaster.

"As this year's hurricane season approaches, safety is first and foremost. I encourage every individual in our state to be prepared early for the storms this hurricane season and not wait until one is upon us," said Attorney General McCollum.

"Our state team is coming together and maximizing our resources and partnerships to help meet the needs of Floridians," said Director Craig Fugate, of the State's Division of Emergency Management. "Residents also need to do their part and get prepared to the best of their ability for the 2008 hurricane season."

Joining the Attorney General and Division of Emergency Management's Deputy Director Ruben Almaguer was Fonda Anderson, Senior Vice President of the Volunteer Florida Foundation, which manages the Florida Disaster Recovery Fund.

"With this important donation to the recovery fund, we are better prepared to help our fellow Floridians should a hurricane strike this season," said Fonda Anderson, senior vice president of the nonprofit Governor's Volunteer Florida Foundation that manages the Fund. "Support ensures our neighbors are not forgotten on the long road to recovery." The Florida Disaster Recovery Fund was created in 2004 to help Floridians with long-term, unmet needs following a FEMA-declared disaster. The Fund is fueled entirely by private-sector donations and more information is available online at <http://www.FLADisasterFund.org>.

Today's donation to the Fund was part of a settlement obtained by the Attorney General's Office with Wyndham International, resolving issues related to undisclosed automatic surcharges improperly imposed at Wyndham hotels. The

money may be used by the Florida Disaster Recovery Fund to help rebuild communities by providing needs identified by local organizations working in recovery.

During declared states of emergency, the Attorney General's Office is also responsible for enforcing the state's price gouging laws. Florida law prohibits excessive increases in the price of essential commodities such as food, water, hotels, ice, gasoline, lumber and equipment needed as a direct result of an officially declared emergency. Violators of the price gouging statute are subject to civil penalties of \$1,000 per violation and up to a total of \$25,000 for multiple violations committed in a single 24-hour period. In addition to the civil penalties for price gouging, state law criminalizes the sale of goods and services to the public without possession of an occupational license. Violators of the law can be charged with a second-degree misdemeanor. Price gouging should be reported to the Attorney General's hotline at 1-866-9-NO-SCAM (1-866-966-7226).

Floridians should also take the necessary precautions to safeguard personal documents or other important information. Often in the wake of natural disasters, papers containing personally identifiable information are misplaced or fall into the wrong hands, complicating the recovery process and putting citizens at risk for identity theft. Scam artists may also attempt to defraud hurricane victims by "selling" products or services they never intend to deliver.

In addition to protecting Florida's residents and guests from any civil infraction that may occur after a storm or a disaster, the Attorney General's Office offers other services to assist during recovery efforts.

Following a disaster, teams of Medicaid Fraud investigators visit nursing homes and assisted living facilities to make sure residents are safe and have electricity to run medical equipment and keep medications refrigerated. These teams also ensure that elderly residents are being properly cared for by licensed and capable individuals at the appropriate care facilities.

Another community service provided by the Attorney General's Office is the Crisis Response Initiative, created in 2003 in partnership with the Florida Crisis Response Team. The team is comprised of approximately 800 crisis responders statewide, including victim service professionals, law enforcement personnel, firefighters, mental health professionals, nurses, other allied professionals and community members. More information is available online at: <http://myfloridalegal.com>. To build a personal, family or business disaster plan please visit <http://www.FloridaDisaster.org>.

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