



# PRICE GOUGING



California's anti-price gouging law was enacted to stop businesses and individuals from taking unfair advantage of consumers during an emergency.

Price gouging is **illegal** in California under Penal Code § 396. Violators can face:

- up to one year in county jail
- fines of up to \$10,000<sup>1</sup>
- civil penalties of up to \$2,500 per violation
- mandatory restitution (refunding consumers for the price paid over the legal price)

## What to look for:

Businesses and individuals cannot increase the price of essential goods and services by more than 10 percent above the pre-emergency price, with limited exceptions.

**Essential goods** include gasoline, propane, home heating oil, food (for people or animals), water, flashlights, radios, batteries, candles, blankets, toiletries, diapers, temporary shelters, building materials, and other emergency and medical supplies



**Essential services** include

- housing rentals<sup>2</sup> (houses, apartments, rooms, hotels, motels, mobile homes, and campsites)
- emergency cleanup services
- repair or reconstruction services



It is also illegal to evict a residential tenant after an emergency is declared in order to charge more than 10% above the pre-emergency price.

Price gouging protections remain in effect for **30 days** following an emergency declaration. For contractor-related cleanup, repair, or reconstruction services, protections extend up to **180 days**. These timelines may be extended.<sup>3</sup>

If you believe you are the victim of price gouging or have information about potential price gouging:

**Please report suspected violations to local law enforcement where the crime occurred or the victim resides and/or the Los Angeles County Department of Consumer and Business Affairs at [stoppricegouging.dcba.lacounty.gov](http://stoppricegouging.dcba.lacounty.gov) or (800) 593-8222.**

The Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office primarily prosecutes felonies in Los Angeles County. Since price gouging is a misdemeanor offense, LADA has criminal jurisdiction over price gouging if the violation occurred in an unincorporated area or in a city without a City Attorney or City Prosecutor. LADA has civil jurisdiction over LA County companies and individuals engaging in unfair business practices.

<sup>1</sup> On Feb. 11, 2025, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors approved an increase in the maximum civil penalty for price gouging to \$50,000 per violation in LA County.

<sup>2</sup> For rental housing that was not rented or advertised for rent prior to a declaration of emergency, the price cannot exceed 160% of the fair market value of the rental housing as established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

<sup>3</sup> On January 12, the California Governor extended price gouging protections for the most common consumer goods, such as food, clothing, and gasoline, as well as for contracting work such as debris removal or construction work, for at least one year. On January 16, the Governor extended price gouging protections for rentals and hotel and motel stays for at least 60 days. These dates may be further extended.