

Housing Authority increases fire relief role

S.B. COUNTY: The agency vows to do more than it did after the blazes four years ago.

BY MARK MUCKENFUSS
THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

In the aftermath of the fires of 2003, the County of San Bernardino's Housing Authority was not involved in the relief efforts. This time around they are.

So far the Housing Authority has helped 15 displaced families receive Section Eight assistance in finding new housing while they rebuild their lives. Through the program, families pay 30 percent of their monthly income toward their rent, with the balance coming from the government, up to a limit of \$1,460.

Spokeswoman Alison Crawford said she expects the number of recipients to grow based on the response she got from evacuees when she was at the National Orange Show Event Center during the disaster.

"I believe we handed out about 75 applications," Crawford said. "And I would say there are approximately nine pending. Some that we handed it out, it turned out their unit

was not affected."

Most of those being assisted are not homeowners, but renters, she said. Many of them had no insurance and lost everything they had in the fires. In an effort to better assist them, she said, they are being put at the front of a waiting list that sometimes takes years to work through.

"If they bring in their documentation, we're issuing a voucher immediately," she said.

The agency did the same for people displaced by Hurricane Katrina who came to the county.

Crawford was with the agency during the 2003 fires. She said she isn't sure why the Housing Authority didn't provide similar relief then.

"With Katrina, more things were fine tuned after that," she said. "I can't speak to prior to that."

Holly McDonell is a spokeswoman for the state Office of Emergency Services. She says more agencies are involved now than after the 2003 fires.

"From every situation in life you learn how to do better and more the next time," McDonell said. "Our goal is always to get as many people as we can out to

the community or as many agencies as we can."

Emergency Services and the Federal Emergency Management Agency came to the community itself on Monday, opening a disaster recovery center at the Hootman Senior Community Center in Running Springs.

Representatives from the agencies will have information on a variety of assistance programs, including help with insurance claims, low-interest loans for home and business owners and renters through the Small Business Administration, unemployment assistance, mental health services and more.

Survivors can also apply for FEMA housing assistance.

FEMA officials say that just because an application is denied, fire survivors shouldn't take that as the final word. It may simply mean that the agency may need more information.

If an applicant has any kind of insurance, FEMA will typically make an initial denial of assistance.

But if applicants have used up their insurance funds, or if those funds are delayed by more than 30 days from the time a claim was filed, officials say

CONTACTS

Housing Authority
of San Bernardino County

672 S. Waterman Ave.

San Bernardino

909-890-9533

The agency has put listings for

homes available to fire victims on
its Web site: www.hacsb.com

FEMA/OES Disaster Recovery Center

Robert Hootman Senior Community
Center

2929 Running Springs School Road
Running Springs

Hours: 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday
through Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Saturday

Register before visiting the center
at 800-621-3362

they should appeal the denial.
An appeal is made by writing
a letter and asking FEMA to
review the case.

Based upon the details in the
denial letter, applicants may
need to provide additional in-
formation and documentation.

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