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November 9, 2007
DR-1731-CA NR-28
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Disaster News

JOINT HOUSING TASK FORCE TACKLES DISASTER HOUSING NEEDS

PASADENA, California — A Joint Housing Task Force was established by FEMA and the state, shortly after the Presidential wildfires declaration, to address the housing needs of those affected by the California wildfires.

The interagency Housing Task Force has been operational at the FEMA/state Joint Field Office in Pasadena to assess and address the housing needs of California wildfire victims. This group is made up of experienced representatives of state and federal agencies.

“The Task Force unites the capabilities and expertise of various agencies to address housing issues,” said Jack Schuback, a FEMA Individual Assistance Officer. “We start by defining key issues and then work to systematically implement housing measures.”

“Helping those who have been affected by the fires as quickly as possible is a priority,” said Henry Renteria, director of the Governor’s Office of Emergency Services (OES) and state coordinating officer for the fires. “We are committed to working with FEMA, as well as our other state and federal partners on the joint housing and other task forces, to expedite recovery.”

As a result of the housing shortage in isolated areas, mobile homes may be used as alternative housing. Housing Task Force staff continues to gather data on possible private and commercial sites for mobile homes to ensure proper code and permit compliance.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the State of California State Supplemental Grant Program (SSGP) assist eligible applicants with housing needs, and using available housing resources contributes to the local economy.

Housing assistance covers rent and/or lodging expenses (up to 18 months); grants to make repairs to the damaged home; and in some cases, applicants may be eligible for help to begin rebuilding a totally destroyed home (up to the maximum grant of \$28,800).

For individuals who have received the maximum grant assistance from FEMA, and still have eligible losses identified by FEMA, the SSGP may provide additional funds to the maximum grant of \$10,000.

Additionally, a representative of the Housing and Urban Development Department (HUD) is present at Disaster Recovery Centers and Local Assistance Centers and can help applicants find rental property. HUD's Housing Locator can identify rental resources available in all affected areas.

Under the Presidential declaration of Oct. 24, approved at the request of California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, those who lost homes or suffered damages to their homes and live in the affected counties (Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, Santa Barbara, San Diego, and Ventura) may be eligible for temporary housing assistance.

Affected individuals who have not yet registered can do so by calling **1-800-621-FEMA (3362)** or **TTY 1-800-462-7585**. Lines are open from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m., daily. Those affected by the fires can also register online at www.fema.gov.

FEMA coordinates the federal government's role in preparing for, preventing, mitigating the effects of, responding to, and recovering from all domestic disasters, whether natural or man-made, including acts of terror.

The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES) coordinates overall state-agency response to major disasters in support of local government. OES is also responsible for maintaining the State Emergency Plan and coordinating the California's preparedness, mitigation and recovery efforts.

Disaster recovery assistance is available without regard to race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, economic status or retaliation. If you or someone you know has been discriminated against, you should call FEMA toll-free at 1-800-621-FEMA (3362) or contact your State Office of Equal rights. If suspicious of any abuse of FEMA programs, please contact the fraud hotline at 1-800-323-8603.

Temporary housing assistance from FEMA does not require that an applicant file for an SBA loan. However, an applicant must complete an SBA loan application to be eligible for additional assistance under the part of the Other Needs Assistance (ONA) program that covers personal property, vehicle repair or replacement, and moving and storage expenses. There are other ONA grants such as public transportation expenses, medical and dental expenses, and funeral and burial expenses that do not require individuals to apply for an SBA loan to be eligible. FEMA will process applications for housing assistance regardless of whether the applicant has applied for an SBA loan, and eligibility determinations for applicants requesting FEMA's temporary housing assistance will not be held up because the applicant has or has not filled out an SBA application.

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