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Road to Recovery Begins for Powerhouse Fire Survivors

by [News Center](#) on June 14, 2013

The long and difficult road to recovery has begun for more than 80 residents of Lake Hughes, Lake Elizabeth and the other communities affected by the Powerhouse Fire who attended Tuesday's Fire Recovery Workshop held at Hughes-Elizabeth Lakes Union Elementary School, which was sponsored by Los Angeles County Supervisor Michael Antonovich and the Los Angeles County Office of Emergency Management.



The workshop, conducted using an open house format, provided local residents the chance to connect with representatives from more than 30 local, state, federal and community based agencies and organizations, including Cal EMA, the California Department of Insurance and the Contractors State License Board, in a one-on-one environment. Approximately 170 people attended the five-hour workshop including community members and agency representatives.



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In addition to learning about what avenues are available to help with insurance-related problems and how to reduce the chances of potential problems with contractors in their rebuilding efforts, survivors were able to discuss possible tax relief with representatives from the Los Angeles County Assessor's Office and find out how they can cope with the tragedy from mental health experts. Representatives from several non-governmental organizations, including the American Red Cross, Salvation Army, California Southern Baptist Disaster Relief and Christian Aid Ministries, were also on hand to share the services available through their respective organizations.



"There is a lot of information out there. We are trying to bring everybody together into one room in order to better serve the community," said Los Angeles County Office of Emergency Management Program Specialist and event co-organizer Jeanne O'Donnell.

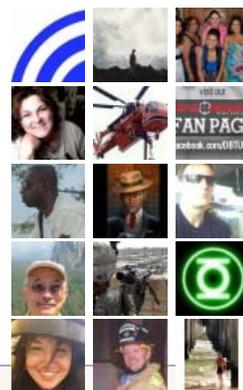


Cal EMA Assistant Secretary Stephen Sellers urged those present to report their damages to local officials so that state and federal emergency officials can get an accurate picture of the fire's impacts on the community and determine if any federal assistance for affected homeowners, renters and business owners is warranted.

"Our hearts go out to those who were affected by the fire," said Sellers. "Even though the fire has been contained, we realize there's much more to do. We are in close contact with county emergency officials and will be working with them and our partners from the Small Business Administration to verify the damage and determine whether assistance for affected homeowners, renters and business owners is possible."

The Cal EMA Assistant Secretary noted that a Fire Management Assistance Grant (FMAG) obtained by Cal EMA from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) on behalf of Governor Brown will help local, state and tribal agencies cover the majority of their response costs and save local taxpayers in the process.

Nonetheless, he noted, Cal EMA recognizes that the fire has placed a significant burden on homeowners, renters, business owners and others in the community and that in many cases insurance won't cover everything.



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“We know that disasters like this forever change the lives of the men, women and children who live, work and go to school in the affected community,” he said. “That’s why it’s important and encouraging that more than two dozen agencies and organizations took part in Tuesday’s workshops and more than 80 residents of the area took advantage of the opportunity to access the valuable services that are available to them.”

Cal EMA staff joining Sellers at the workshop included Lidia Armas from the Cal EMA Individual Assistance Branch, Bob Lawson from the Cal EMA Public Assistance Branch and Mona Bontty and Yvette LaDuke from the Cal EMA Southern Region.

Their participation and interaction with attendees provided staff with opportunities to help by providing support, lending an ear and sharing with others the key functions within Cal EMA.

“A gentleman I met at the workshop and had recently spoke to over the phone (at Mather) thanked me for talking to him and really appreciated the advice provided to him,” said Armas. “He said he was so overwhelmed with losing his home, he just didn’t know what to do.”



Lawson encountered a member of the community concerned about the possible fate of his emergency supplies following a major disaster.

A resident, said Lawson, “asked me ‘If I stockpile a considerable amount of food and water in my home in preparation of a catastrophic disaster event, could FEMA confiscate all or part of my stockpile to assist others that did not prepare ahead of time?’”

Lawson reassured the resident.

“I told him that I had never heard of such a thing and doubted seriously that FEMA would even consider such actions even in extreme situations,” he said.

The workshop provided Bontty, who serves as Deputy Regional Administrator, and LaDuke, an Emergency Services Coordinator, a recovery-related workshop first-hand.

“We learned of the devastating losses various local residents experienced and were able to interact with community members and show our support as representatives of Cal EMA”, said Bontty.

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