

# HORIZONS

Office of Cerro Grande Fire Claims



Federal Emergency Management Agency

March 16, 2001

## IN THIS ISSUE:

- FEMA Director Joe Allbaugh's Fact-Finding Trip
- Sen. Domenici expresses optimism about OCGFC
- Roundtable Discussions Provide Important Input for OCGFC
- Popular Espanola Customer Service Representative
- Mitigation Specialists Available for Thursday Appointments

## CONTACT US!

HELPLINE: 888-748-1853

Hours: 9 a.m. - 6 p.m. M-F  
9 a.m. - 12 p.m. Sat.

### EMAIL:

[cerrograndenewsletter@fema.gov](mailto:cerrograndenewsletter@fema.gov)

### WEBSITE:

[www.fema.gov/cerrogrande](http://www.fema.gov/cerrogrande)

## PROBLEMS?

### Contact Your Ombudsman

#### Espanola

Veronica Verde  
Office: 747-4204  
Cell: 505-934-9728

#### Santa Clara and San Ildefonso

Joseph Hesbrook  
Office: 424-5908  
Cell: 505-934-9699

#### Los Alamos and White Rock Businesses

Bill Lehman  
Office: 661-3121  
Cell: 505-934-9698

#### Los Alamos and White Rock Individuals, M-Th, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Dorothy Hamory  
Office: 661-3121  
Cell: 505-934-9719

## Senator Domenici Optimistic About CGFAA Progress

It has been more than 10 months since the devastating Cerro Grande Fire swept through the region and impacted the lives of so many New Mexicans. And at all levels of government and community, we have worked together toward restoring homes, businesses and the quality of life for everyone involved. Despite many challenges, I believe we have made progress in that endeavor. I think the confirmation of Joe Allbaugh as the new FEMA director also bodes well for continued advances and improvements in the fire claims process.

I have had the opportunity to visit several times with Director Allbaugh and am impressed with his commitment to carry out FEMA's responsibility under the law passed by the congressional delegation in record time last summer. I think Allbaugh's visit to Los Alamos and San Ildefonso and Santa Clara pueblos March 8, just weeks after his confirmation, is further testament that he has made compensation to Cerro Grande Fire victims a top priority.

Toward that end, FEMA's Office of Cerro Grande Fire Claims is well equipped with resources and a big checkbook to make sure all victims receive reimbursement for their approved claims. Last year, the delegation successfully gained quick enactment of an emergency appropriations package that included \$45 million to run the claims office and \$455 million to pay victim's claims.

***I want to assure everyone that there will be plenty of funding to pay all approved claims.*** The claims approved by FEMA so far have barely dented the fund. The important point is that the federal government accepted responsibility for setting the fire, and it

will be responsible for providing restitution to victims. This is evidenced by the speed and conviction with which Congress approved this funding last year, a mere 50 days after the fire. Such legislation is rare and such quick action by the Congress is even rarer.

Moreover, I have secured specific guarantees from the new Bush administration that this funding will remain entirely intact and available to fire victims trying to move on with their lives.

All in all, I think we have charted a good course in our quest to help restore Los Alamos and the Espanola Valley. I stand ready to help in any way I can, and urge you to contact my local representative, Veronica Rodriguez, at (505) 988-6511.

## FEMA Director Allbaugh Visits with Fire Survivors

Representatives of fire survivors, including individuals, County Council members, business owners and Pueblos met Thursday, March 8, with FEMA Director Joe Allbaugh in a series of private meetings to air their observations and recommendations regarding the Cerro Grande fire compensation program.

"I'm here to learn what works and what needs work," Allbaugh told each group.

The main issue brought up was the need for the final regulations to be published. He had hoped to bring the final regs with him on his New Mexico trip, but they were still awaiting OMB approval. Allbaugh promised to keep up the pressure for final approval, and hoped to have them before the end of March.



## Make an Appointment for Mitigation Consultations

Individual claimants now can make an appointment with a mitigation specialist for one-on-one consultations on all areas of mitigation assistance available through the Cerro Grande Fire Assistant Act (CGFAA).

In addition to a community mitigation program, there is a program designed for individuals whose homes and yards were damaged or destroyed by the fire. Up to 15 percent of an individual claimant's compensation for losses to the structure and land caused by the Cerro Grande fire may be used for fire-resistant safety measures for restoration or construction and landscaping.

Consultations, which include early guidance on mitigation measures as well as assistance and advice on filling out all forms for finalization, will be held every Thursday at the Customer Service Center in the Los Alamos IT Building, 235 Central Park Square, from 2 p.m. to 9 p.m. Claimants may schedule appointments by telephoning (505) 424-5910 or (505) 424-5958.

Beyond scheduled meetings, mitigation specialists remain available at the Office of Cerro Grande Fire Claims (OCGFC) Monday through Friday during regular business hours in Santa Fe, and in the Los Alamos Library on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Claimants who meet with OCGFC specialists will receive a copy of a video documentary film titled "Making Your Home Firewise," which covers historic fires and the latest technology and recommendations for firewise landscaping, restoration and construction of homes. (available while copies last).

### Payments Processed As of 03/10/01

#### Payments Processed:

Individuals	\$ 31,185,793
Businesses	\$ 15,119,154
Not-For-Profit	\$ 89,063
State/County	\$ 6,086,133

Total Partial Payments:  
\$ 51,374,492

## Cerro Grande Fire Claims Customer Service Centers

Hours: M-F 9am - 6 pm

Saturday 9-12 noon

### Los Alamos

IT Building  
235 Central Park Square  
661-3121

### White Rock

134 State Rd. 4  
672-4020

### Espanola

Johnson Controls  
Building  
1027 North Railroad  
Avenue  
747-4204

### Santa Clara Pueblo

Behind Health Clinic  
747-0313

### San Ildefonso Pueblo

TEWA Visitors Center  
455-7759

## Roundtable Discussions Provide Important Input For OCGFC

Valuable constructive input regarding implementation of the Cerro Grande Fire Assistance Act is coming from a series of roundtable discussions held by OCGFC with a broad cross-section of community members.

The meetings, which began in November, are held approximately every three weeks with one of three rotating groups. An OCGFC moderator listens to the groups and takes notes. The meeting ground rules are designed to encourage an open exchange of ideas and free input, allowing every participant the opportunity to respond to each question posed by CGFCA.

Topics considered by the roundtables include:

- The best and most effective avenues to provide information to claimants and the public regarding the Cerro Grande Fire Assistance Act;
- The claims review process and how it could be improved;
- The method of developing a list of personal property losses and how it might be improved; and
- The housing replacements policy.

Key questions have been directed toward a fair way to gauge loss of value to home and property, and at what point in time should loss of value be computed. Related to this is how one would compensate for such things as loss of view.

Discussed at the recent meeting were questions regarding how to fairly assess the loss of intellectual property destroyed by fire. Losses could range from irreplaceable business and personal information, loss of book manuscripts, and research related to a

Ph.D. thesis.

At the end of each meeting, the moderator opens the floor for 10 minutes to allow every participant to identify further areas of concern. These topics are the basis for future roundtable questions

When a particular group reconvenes, they are updated on how their input was implemented, either with developing policy or process.

## Fraud Hurts Everyone

Cerro Grande Fire Assistance Act (CGFAA) funds are American taxpayer dollars. This money is available to compensate individuals, businesses, state and local governments and pueblos.

"Unfortunately, there are some individuals who may try to take advantage of this assistance," said Don Erbach, director of the OFCGC. "Our responsibility is to be certain these funds go to the true victims of the Cerro Grande fire."

The Office of Inspector General (OIG), an arm of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), aggressively investigates potential fraud. If you see instances of possible fraud, please call the OIG at:

**800-323-8603**

or

**505-424-5919**