

# Firestorm 2003 Update

Special points of interest:

- Join our email list for up to the minute information—info@oldfirerecoverygroup.org
- Come to our weekly meetings for community support
- Report Fire Survivor discounts to us so we can spread the good news!
- Find links related to this newsletter on our website [www.oldfirerecoverygroup.org](http://www.oldfirerecoverygroup.org)

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## Insurance Update by CARE

More than 500 insurance claims (about 14% of the fire-storm total) have had companies limits increased and paid. They range from \$10,000 to doubling of all coverage limits or more. Most, but not all were required to sign "releases" preventing disclosure of increases. *The better the homeowner's documentation of their loss, the greater the increase in limits.* Several insurers have paid the insured based on a scope of loss created by specialized contractor Bob Rettig. At least another 500 have been acknowledged by insurance companies as "underinsured"

Public adjuster problems are being reported to CARE at a rate of approximately 3-4 a week. Hispanic and elderly are often impacted. Some of the problems reported are related to non-performance, lack of communication, inac-

curate coverage information, and the public adjuster taking the insurance companies side.



Problems are emerging for owners with a partial loss at a rate of 3-4 a week. Problems include, clothes still smelling of fire, fabrics damaged by harsh cleaning fluids, soot bleeding through the new paint, violations of clear line of sight rule on partial repairs, and contractors or insurance companies ignoring asbestos contamination.

Contractor problems are also on the rise. Relating to insurance, workers compensation coverage MUST be verified by owner before contract signed and work begins. Owners acting as their own builder MUST carry their

own workers compensation. This is a different form of coverage from the usual home owner policy coverage. It is very expensive and can be as high as \$68 per \$100 of carpenter payroll.

Underinsurance is becoming a nationally recognized subject with independent investigations by National Public Radio, PBS, Associated Press and New York Times. Patterns have emerged regarding the use of Marshall & Swift software used by insurance companies for creating policy limits. Numbers generated from this program have been verified by the numbers with insurance company policies and homeowners' scopes of loss.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact CARE at 818-216-0123 or visit [www.carehelp.org](http://www.carehelp.org).

## Disaster Income Tax Workshop

On September 19, 2004 at 2PM Anna Maria Galdieri, CPA and Chair of the Disaster Tax Subcommittee for the California Society of CPA's will be at the Calvary Baptist Church in San Bernardino discussing disaster tax issues with fire survivors.

Galdieri was instrumental in getting the law changed to ease the tax burden on disaster victims after she worked with

victims of the fires that ravaged Oakland Hills in 1991.

"Before they settle with their insurance company or decide what to do about rebuilding or refurbishing, wildfire victims should consult a CPA or a qualified tax adviser," Galdieri cautions. "It is important for disaster victims to understand their options before they make these important decisions."

[excerpts taken from calcpa.org]

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## Help for the uninsured

**REBUILD SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY (RSBC)** is the long-term fire recovery committee of more than 20 faith-based and community-based organizations established to assist uninsured homeowner survivors of the wildfire and mudflows with rebuilding.

About 51 uninsured homeowners have been identified by FEMA as having lost their home during the 2003 California Wildfires and mudflows. These homeowners also face other challenges like disability, advanced age, low income, and single-parenthood. They have received all the financial assistance they are qualified for from FEMA, and do not qualify for SBA loans or bank loans because they are unemployed or earn a low-income.

"The heart of Paul Reinhard is to reach his community... and this is very evident by all the services they offer residents living in the neighborhood."



Rebuild San Bernardino County is working hard every day to obtain the money, manpower, and materials that will help these families return to their original home site, thus restoring property values in their neighborhoods and the general quality of life in their communities.

RSBC has received financial support from the California Community Foundation, Allstate Foundation, Farmers

Insurance, the Los Angeles Times Family Fund, service clubs, churches, and individuals. We will need to raise more than \$3 million in order to rebuild 51 homes. This figure would double, were it not for the volunteer construction labor provided by the Mennonite Disaster Service.

We hope to break ground on the first 2 homes by mid-October; we have recently hired a Construction Manager to oversee the entire rebuilding process, which we estimate will take from 2 to 5 years.

If you would like further information, or wish to make a tax-deductible financial or in-kind donation, please call Kristen Pritchard, Executive Director, at 909-792-0255 or visit [www.rebuildsbcounty.org](http://www.rebuildsbcounty.org)

## Calvary Baptist Church - A leader in community service

On July 22, 2003, Somebody Cares Southland (SCS) and Calvary Baptist Church (CBC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding that establishes CBC as an SCS designated Neighborhood Service Center. The heart of Paul Reinhard, Senior Pastor of CBC, is to reach his community for Christ and this is very evident by all the services they

offer residents living in the local neighborhood (called the "30/40 neighborhood"). Below are some ways in which they are reaching out to the community:

- Food Distribution
- ESL Classes
- Narcotics Anonymous Meetings Location
- Vital Communities Dialogue Location for CSUSB/CUP

- Awana's Club – Children's Discipleship Program
- Pastor's on Campus at Golden Valley and Cajon
- Old Fire Recovery Group weekly meetings

For more info on SCS please call Terri at 909-463-6379 or visit [somebodycaresonline.org](http://somebodycaresonline.org)

For more info on Calvary Baptist Church call 909-882-8708 or visit [calvarysbdo.org](http://calvarysbdo.org)

## Class Action Lawsuit filed by fire victims

A class-action lawsuit was filed on May 5 against four major insurance companies who write homeowner's insurance in California. The lawsuit alleges [among other things] that the insurance companies acted in bad faith by charging their insureds a full renewal premium for their homes and personal property that burned in last October's Wildfires and no longer exist.

"In effect, the insurance companies are selling snake oil-coverage on homes they recognize no longer exist," said Claremont attorney Michael Bidart, who has been working with Los Angeles and San Bernardino county residents.

"Some agents have basically told these already victimized

families to either pay the premium or risk cancellation of their homeowner's insurance policy," attorney Harvey Levine said. "These tactics represent another layer of unlawful and fraudulent conduct being perpetrated against policyholders."



Get a fair and balanced settlement.

[excerpts taken from [insurancejournal.com](http://insurancejournal.com)]

## Problem with your contractor?

Unfortunately, problems can arise when working on a complicated project like a construction project. To help avoid problems here are some guidelines.

1. Make sure you hire a licensed contractor. (call CSLB toll-free number or check online)
2. Make sure you keep a written log of the entire process.
3. Get professional advice on the content of any contract you sign.
4. Make sure everything is verified in writing, including any changes (which should also include the change in price for the proposed change.)

When you have a concern, submit it in writing to the contractor and give him a chance to fix the problem. If you are unwilling or unable to resolve the problem, file a complaint with the Contractors

State Licensing board (CSLB) or consult an attorney.

The San Bernardino City Attorney, Jim Penman is consulting (free of charge) with fire survivors. His office number is 909-387-5355.

If you need to file a complaint, you can do it online:

1. Go to [www.csrb.ca.gov](http://www.csrb.ca.gov)
2. Click on "Consumers"
3. Click on "Filing a Construction Complaint"

You can also call their automated system 24 hours a day

**800-321-CSLB (2752)** to check the status of a license, or order complaint forms.

You can call to consult with the complaint department by calling 562-466-6000 8AM-5PM M-F.

If you decide to file a complaint, fill out a *complaint form* and be sure to attach copies of all relevant

documentation. CSLB will contact both the contractor and the complainant and attempt to mediate the dispute.

The main complaints department has a staff of 8 people ready to talk to you about any problems that arise. Their number is: 562-466-6088.

Once a formal complaint is filed, it will be forwarded to the local office right here in San Bernardino where an investigator will be assigned to your case.

If you know of an unlicensed contractor currently working on a project, call the local office at 909-890-2205 and they will dispatch an investigator to the site.

Construction projects are new to most of us, but don't worry there are people ready and willing to help! Also check our schedule (pg 4) for our next "Working With Contractors" workshop.

As of Sep 06, 2004  
there have been 630  
complaints filed  
with the CDI  
from Firestorm  
2003 survivors.

## They're Here to Help

### AGENCY

- American Red Cross Long Term Recovery Team 909-888-1481  
 Lutheran Disaster Response Bev Rios 909-855-0523  
 Rebuild San Bernardino County (see pg 2) 909-792-0255  
 Wildfire Recovery Project (mental health issues) 909-986-7111  
 Mennonite Disaster Services 909-988-6971

### GOVERNMENT OFFICES

- San Bernardino City Attorney 909-387-5355  
 San Bernardino City Development Services 909-384-5071  
 San Bernardino City Mayor's Office 909-384-5133  
 San Bernardino County Flood Control 909-387-7920  
 San Bernardino County Planning Department 909-387-4451

### LICENCE CHECK

- California Bar Association 800-843-9053  
 Contractors State Licensing 800-321-CSLB (2752)  
 Check an insurance agent or public adjusters license status 800-967-9331

### INSURANCE COMPLAINTS

- California Department of Insurance 800-927-HELP (4357)

## "10 Tips for making sure your contractor measures up" by the CSLB

The California Contractors State License Board has a great handout that outlines the "10 tips for making sure your contractor measures up." The tips are as follows:

1. Hire only licensed Contractors.
2. Check contractor's license number at **800-321-2752** or [www.csrb.ca.gov](http://www.csrb.ca.gov)
3. Get three references, review past work.
4. Get at least three bids.
5. Get a written contract and don't sign anything until you completely understand the terms.
6. Pay 10% down, or \$1,000, whichever is less.
7. Don't let payments get ahead of work. Keep records of payments.
8. Don't make final payment until you're satisfied with the job.
9. Don't pay cash.
10. Keep a job file of all papers relating to your project.

Contact the CSLB for your free copy of this brochure. While you're at it, also ask for the "Home Improvement Bill of Rights".

Don't forget that the City Attorney has volunteered, at no charge, to review any contracts for fire survivors. Call them at 909-387-5355.



*Old Fire Survivors  
helping Old Fire Survivors*

The Old Fire Recovery Group is a group of survivors from the Old Fire who have banded together for a quicker and more informed recovery. We are dedicated to providing cost-free disaster recovery support and information.

We have also networked with fire survivors in other areas from past and present fires to find what solutions have worked for them. We realize that the Old Fire was not the first urban wildfire and it is not the last. We want to learn from the lessons of others to make our recovery as easy and informed as possible.

We hope to find assistance for survivors in these areas:

- Rebuilding
- Architects and Contractors
- Insurance
- Mental Health
- Sources of Financial Aid

If you are in need of assistance, please contact us so we can find help for you!

Lila Hayes

## Upcoming workshops

Schedule Subject to change without notice. For an updated schedule, visit our website at [www.oldfirerecoverygroup.org](http://www.oldfirerecoverygroup.org) or call us at 909-266-1459

Date	Day	Topic	Location
<b>Sep 11 10:00 AM</b>	Saturday	ASID Phoenix Project	Lutheran Church 5050 Sierra Way
<b>Sep 12 2:00 PM</b>	Sunday	City Building Department Q&A & Insurance Workshop with CARe	Calvary Baptist Church 3701 Sierra Way
<b>Sep 19 2:00 PM</b>	Sunday	Anna Maria Galdieri CPA & Chair - Disaster Tax Subcommittee for CA Society of CPA's Organized and attended by CARe	Calvary Baptist Church 3701 Sierra Way
<b>Sep 26 2:00 PM</b>	Sunday	"The mechanics of working with Contractors" & Insurance Workshop with CARe	Calvary Baptist Church 3701 Sierra Way
<b>Oct 03 2:00 PM</b>	Sunday	Insurance Workshop with CARe	Calvary Baptist Church 3701 Sierra Way
<b>Oct 07 7:00 PM</b>	Thursday	Post Fire Debris Flow update/Q&A attended by both city and county officials	First Congregational Church 3041 Sierra Way

Join our email list and get  
information as we find it!  
[info@oldfirerecoverygroup.org](mailto:info@oldfirerecoverygroup.org)

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Los materials de The Old Fire Recovery Group  
estàn disponibles en inglés, y español. Por  
favor llame Ramona al 909-882-3258