

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
- Get a list of Fire Survivor discounts on our website or a printed list at our meetings!
- Find links related to this newsletter on our website www.oldfirerecoverygroup.org

Property Tax Information

Of all the confusing subjects out there, taxes is right up there at the top of the list. With the passage of Prop 13, property taxes seem to be less confusing, but there are still many things that can be left open to interpretation.

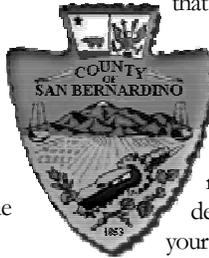
The Board of Equalization is who the assessor's go to when they have questions about the tax code.

Recently the San Bernardino County Tax Assessor, Donald Williamson questioned how property taxes are calculated once a survivor replaced the home they lost.

You might have heard that if the improvement on the lot (your house) was valued at \$100,000 before the fire, it would be replaced at \$100,000 when you replace it. That is only true depending on how long it takes you to rebuild. Presently, the tax assessor is required to increase the value of the improvement by 2% every year, even if the home is not there. That means if it

takes 3 years to replace your home, it would be placed back on the books at about \$103,030.

Since this compounds annually, the higher value your improvement is and the longer it takes you to rebuild, the more pronounced the difference is. Also, remember that property taxes are paid every year, not just once, so you will be paying more on your tax bill every year after



that as well. This difference can even follow you (and grow bigger and bigger) for the rest of your life, depending on your circumstances.

Mr. Williamson does not think this is a correct interpretation of the law. He thinks that if it leaves the tax rolls at \$100,000 it should come back on at \$100,000. He has even been going to Sacramento, to get the Board to side with him.

In his most recent trip he thinks

he might have even changed a few minds.

Final resolution has yet to be determined, but in the mean time you can contact the office of the tax assessor at (909) 387-0117 with questions.

The Riverside Press Enterprise did an article on this subject on March 20, 2005 in an article titled *Assessor vs. Taxes*.

If you have other questions concerning property taxes, especially if you decided to sell the lot and buy a replacement house and you want to do your own research about property tax law, you can start by looking up the following sections in the California Revenue & Taxation Code:

Section 69 refers to the transfer of Proposition 13 values to replacement properties and Section 170 refers to the reconstruction of properties

These sections can be found by going to:

<http://www.leginfo.ca.gov> and click on "California Law"

Electricity Discount for Fire Survivors

Neil Derry, the city councilman for the 4th ward (Del Rosa) district, also works at Edison as the Region Manager of Public Affairs. He has worked out a deal with Edison for fire survivors!

Usually power from a temporary power pole, is charged a higher, commercial, rate then you would pay on a residence. They have instituted a

new policy where you can now be charged the residential rate PLUS get a CREDIT for the difference between the higher and lower rate for all power used on the site since the fire!!!

In order to get this discount you MUST contact Neil Derry directly. Customer service reps can not help. 909-930-8501 or neil.derry@sce.com

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Interest on Your Mortgage Escrow Account

If you had a mortgage at the time of the fire, your insurance company probably made your structure reimbursement checks out to both you and your mortgage company.

Although each lender has different policies (other variables include the amount of your insurance check, the value of the land and the amount of your loan), the mortgage company likely kept some of that money in an "escrow account" pending completion of the rebuild.

Although the exact amount of

money they're allowed to keep is still not exactly clear to us (go to our website, click on "Resources" then on "Professional Issues" and scroll down to the Mortgage section for more information) the amount of interest they are supposed to pay on this account is now under discussion by some survivors. From what we can gather, it seems that they should be paying 2% interest on these accounts.

One survivor in the San Diego area said the following: "The only laws on escrow accounts are HUD's

Real Estate Settlement Procedures Act. It sets limits on the amounts that a lender may require a borrower to put into an escrow account for purposes of paying taxes, hazard insurance and other charges related to the property. "

If you have problems or questions regarding your escrow account, please contact the Office of the Comptroller of Currency (OCC) at 800-613-6743 to find out which of the regulatory bodies regulates you bank or lender.

"... from what we can tell, mortgage companies should be paying 2% interest on escrow accounts..."

Keeping your lot clean and safe

It's been almost 18 months since the fire and it's coming to the end of the rainy season. This year's record breaking rains not only brought havoc through debris slides, but will continue to effect survivors who have not yet begun the rebuild process.

Pools—because of the health issues associated with standing water (think West Nile Virus), you must be sure to keep your pool dry. Although the local governments

have not pumped pools since the fire, it might do so in the future if your pool shows signs of neglect.

Weeds—weed abatement is crucial in keeping the fire hazard down for the upcoming fire season. If you can not afford to clean up the weeds yourself, please contact Robert Houts of the City Code Enforcement Department at 909-384-5241 to see if there are any programs available or the American Red Cross who still has

money available for fire survivors.

Remember, when the government enters your property, they will give you ample notice *if they can get in touch with you*. Make sure they have your mailing address.

If someone shows up without notice claiming to be sent by the city or county, please get their contact information and check into it.

Gas Company reinstatement procedures

After all of the time and energy you spend rebuilding your house, the last thing you need is a delay in getting your utilities connected!

Here are the procedures for getting your gas connected which we received from Jeffrey Graden, the District Operations Manager for San Bernardino/Rim Forest/Beaumont region of the Southern California Gas Company. His number is, 909-335-7922.

1. Verify with your builder that the Gas Houseline is installed on the same side of the house as it was previously. If line is installed in a different location, the homeowner will incur a cost.

2. Call 1-800-427-2200 about 6 weeks before construction is

completed and identify yourself as a Firestorm Victim. Explain to Customer Service Representative that you need to schedule a Field Planner



visit to your location for service reinstatement.

3. Field Planner will visit location within *5-7 working days*.

4. Service re-instatement order will be issued by Field Planner and competed by Gas Co. personnel or qualified pipeline contractor within *4-weeks* of field visit.*

5. Upon approval of Houseline Plumbing by local Building Department, call 1-800-427-2200.

Identify yourself as a Firestorm Victim and explain to Customer Service Representative that you need to apply for Meter Set/Turn On Application.

6. Order will be issued for Field Service Representative to set meter and turn on gas *within 2 working days*.

Please note that if the meter is going to be located in a different location then the original house (example, moved from the left side to the right side) the customer will have to pay for the re-instatement and the process will take 6-8 weeks.

California State Legislation Update

Since the fire, many state legislators are taking the opportunity to bring to light (and change) some of the issues involved with disaster recovery. So far we have spotted the following up on the legislative radar:

AB 662 (LeSuer) - Deals with liability issues by professionals who have (or want to) volunteer after the Cedar Fire.

SB 2 (Speier) - Deals with many insurance issues that homeowners faced after the fire including Personal Property inventory, ALE time limits and the process of determining limits.

SB 251 (Morrow) - Gives options for avoiding the personal property inventory requirements.

SB 477 (Soto) - Deals with organization of community disaster recovery efforts by using OES as a central point of organization.

SB 518 (Kehoe) - deals with a)

ALE time limits, b) making sure a claimant receives a copy of the policy in a timely manner and c) requiring the insurance company to create detailed accounts of their losses in each ZIP code twice each year.



For more info, contact the
Legislative Counsel at
<http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/>

As with all legislation, changes are made all the way through the process so something you support now, might change dramatically.

The best place to keep watch on it is by going to the states website and watch the modifications. You can even "subscribe" to a bill so you're notified when changes are made.

Visit www.leginfo.ca.gov for more information.

Get involved by doing some research on these bills and contact your representatives to let them know how you feel about the bills. Some of the California State representatives who represent the San Bernardino area are:

Senate - Nell Soto
(909) 381-3832

Senate - Robert Dutton
(909) 466-4180

Assembly - Bill Emmerson
(909) 466-9096

Assembly - Joe Baca
(909) 388-1413

Assembly - Dennis Mountjoy
(626) 359-8305

"... many state legislators are... bringing to light some of the issues involved with disaster recovery."

Course of Construction Insurance

Questions on Course of Construction Insurance are common. Survivors want to know if it's needed and what it covers

We have learned that Course of Construction insurance covers different things than Homeowners insurance. Most of us kept our homeowners insurance to make sure our new personal property was covered as well as to keep the liability portion of our insurance or because our insurance company told us that we wouldn't be able to find new coverage if we let ours lapse.

Many people have called their insurance agent or company about course of construction insurance only to be told that it is not needed since they still have their homeowners policy.

I have been told by *other* survivors that they followed this advice only to be told that a loss

happened during construction that was not covered, but would've been covered by CoC Insurance. For example they were told that appliances (and other construction material, tools and supplies) that are not installed are not considered part of the house and are not covered. Another example is that if you have custom cabinetry enroute to your house and the truck is in an accident and the cabinets are ruined they are also not considered "covered".

We have also been told that if you have Course of Construction Insurance and you move even one stick of personal property into the house (including the garage) your Course of Construction Insurance is null and void and will not cover any further loss even if you do not yet have a certificate of completion

by the local building department.

This happens most commonly when people decide to save money and start storing stuff in their garage instead of the storage facility they've been renting. Then something happens that would normally be covered by course of construction insurance, but because they had been storing personal property in their garage, they were no longer covered.

Please be sure to call an expert (survivors have recommended a couple of brokers to us... call for a referral) to discuss course of construction insurance in more detail. It is not very expensive (prices were around \$2.00 per \$1,000 for 12 months when I called a couple of months ago) and it might just give you piece of mind.



*Old Fire Survivors
helping Old Fire Survivors*

OFRG... Planning for the end

It's hard to believe that it has been almost a year since we received our funding, but it's true! In July it will be a year since we became an official project of Community Partners and our funding will come to an end. I will continue to do the website and email updates on my own but we will no longer be able to have printed and mailed newsletters or postcards since they cost several hundred dollars each to produce.

At that point we will also be making changes to our meeting schedule. We will probably only meet once a month and we're thinking of stopping the informational seminars and having only a monthly social get together until the second anniversary when we will stop meeting all together.

One idea we had was to do sort of a "progressive dinner" thing where each month we visit 2 or 3 (or maybe even 4) newly rebuilt houses on a block or other small area which would include a small walking tour while walking between homes. Dining would be optional... we're open to suggestions and also to people who would like to share their new home with other survivors.

Please contact us if you're interested in volunteering your home for this type of activity. We're thinking of doing one in July, August, September and October.

Lila Hayes
Coordinator
909-266-1459 or info@oldfirerecoverygroup.org

Upcoming workshops

For an updated schedule, visit our website at www.oldfirerecoverygroup.org or call us at 909-266-1459.

Date	Day	Topic	Location
May 8 2:00 PM	Sunday	No Meeting due to Mother's Day	
May 22 2:00 PM	Sunday	Hiring and Working with Contractors" by Frank Williams of the BIA (Building Industry Assoc.)	Calvary Baptist Church 3701 Sierra Way
Jun 12 2:00 PM	Sunday	To be determined.	Calvary Baptist Church 3701 Sierra Way
Jun 26 2:00 PM	Sunday	To be determined.	Calvary Baptist Church 3701 Sierra Way

Please note that we are only meeting on the 2nd and 4th Sundays. Please call if you need assistance!



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