

EQ-1989-SC County-Rebuilding

FEMA operating at full speed, but that's too slow for victims

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SACRAMENTO — The good news last week for those still suffering hardship in the aftermath of the Oct. 17 earthquake was that the Federal Emergency Management Agency was operating at full speed.

The bad news was that full speed was not nearly enough to satisfy thousands of people now trying to rebuild their lives in the wreckage.

FEMA officials were quick to point out that the agency is geared to getting people back on their feet again, and does not function as a complete restoration contractor or comprehensive insurance agency.

Federal officials maintain that they have made a difference already and will continue to as losses are assessed and President Bush's \$3.45 billion disaster-aid package is implemented.

"We are working as fast as we can to process applications," FEMA spokesman Bill Villa said.

Villa said about 900 of the hardest-hit quake victims had received \$2.5 million in federal assistance as of last Wednesday.

Under the FEMA assistance plan, individuals and families are provided with monetary assistance if their homes have been rendered uninhabitable by the earthquake. Funds can be used

to obtain rental housing and for repairs needed to make the homes habitable again.

Villa said another 818 Californians had received individual family grants — grants of as much as \$10,400 for those whose needs are not covered by other disaster-relief programs or insurance.

He said 1,088 Californians have been issued applications for Small Business Administration loans through last Wednesday. The loans have low interest rates of 4 percent or 8 percent, with recipients having as long as 30 years to repay.