

Disappointment Adds To Disaster

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While the large majority of us can look back at the Jan. 4-6 storm and be thankful for not losing loved ones or our homes, some of those who suffered are finding there is disappointment that follows disaster.

Judging from the variety and multitude of telephone calls — we were lucky to get our service back early like most customers — to The Sentinel during the past week, confusion and uncertainty have added to dire circumstances for many county residents.

As published on Page 1 on Thursday, "Disaster-Relief (Is) Not For Everyone," nor does it come from the state and federal government the day after a person applies.

The wisest thing for us to do at this point is "be patient," as is now printed at the door of the Federal Emergency Management Agency office in the Veterans Building on Front Street.

That understandably can be difficult advice to follow, especially after neighbors and friends, the Salvation Army, Red Cross and other human services agencies opened their cupboards, wallets and homes in such magnitude after the floods hit.

It's probable that those seeking relief thought the state/federal agencies would respond in kind, but that isn't a very

realistic way of looking at it. Those offices have a responsibility to "the people" to see that only qualified persons receive funds and goods from public agencies.

And, although the FEMA manager here said there hasn't been any signs of fraud in applications for housing so far, but there are continual reports that some "freeloaders" are dropping by disaster relief centers for some free clothes and food.

There are, of course, all types of special circumstances, such as from the family who has been ordered to leave its home and contends it should get some monetary support for "new" housing, or at least for transportation. Another report was from a fellow who said he lost his \$350 Social Security check and wanted to be reimbursed (but wasn't), and the mother who sought some assistance to have a \$40,000 retaining wall built behind her \$275,000 house so her dwelling doesn't become a "disaster."

Other homeowners have shaken their heads when they find the limits of disaster relief. The limits are \$50,000 on real property and \$10,000 personal property, or \$55,000 for a combination of the two. Furthermore, if you have a job or can get credit, the best you can probably hope for from the federal government is a 16 percent loan; otherwise, it might be 8 percent.

Every bit as much concerned as private

property owners is the Santa Cruz County government which is looking at a \$22 million tab to get the unincorporated area back in shape. The county has been told it should expect to support \$5 million to \$6 million of the bill, and that the state's financial condition has become so tight that there may be a \$4 million "shortfall" from Sacramento. If that be the case, it's going to be a matter of years, not months, before this county's roads and services get back to normal.

As stated in this space last week, the people of Santa Cruz County are to be commended on the manner in which they responded to help one another after the flood. It wasn't a question of whether they would help, but rather it has been one of how to get the large numbers of volunteers pointed in the right direction so their wishes to assist might be fulfilled.

Then, the job of the government helping out came to the fore, and more people registered (1,466) at this county's FEMA office Monday through Friday than any of the six disaster assistance centers in central/northern California.

The red tape may seem more like a headache to those who want, and deserve, immediate help.

However, we must also realize there is a reason each application has to be verified, for if the state/federal government doesn't substantiate its grants, then its program becomes a disaster in itself.