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Recovery and Rebuilding Begins in Bastrop

Thousands of Bastrop County residents have sought temporary housing far and wide after the loss of 1,600 homes in what has become the costliest wildfire in Texas history. Homeowners left homeless after the Labor Day weekend fire have taken up residence in local motels, apartments, trailers and with friends and family as far away as Austin and Houston.

Insurance companies are picking up many of the expenses of policyholders affected by the fire by providing additional living expenses that helps pay for clothing, food, transportation and a temporary place to live. Insurance adjusters are in the process of working with every homeowner to assess the damage and help begin the rebuilding process.

“It will be a slow recovery period simply because of the number of people required in the rebuilding effort,” said Mark Hanna, a spokesman for the Insurance Council of Texas. “Each homeowner who wants to rebuild should conduct due diligence in finding the right building contractor.”

While hundreds of homes were destroyed, many others appeared to have been untouched. Insurance adjusters highly recommend that homeowners get more than one estimate to repair any fire or smoke damage before making a financial commitment.

Community leaders in the city and county are working together to urge displaced homeowners to rebuild. Many of the subdivisions that burned were filled with retirees who have indicated they may move elsewhere. Even people whose homes survived the massive blaze have said it will be hard for them to return to an area where their neighbor’s homes are gone and their blanket of pine trees scorched.

“Many retirees say they won’t build another home,” said Susan Nogues of Nogues Real Estate in Bastrop. “Some have said they don’t have the time to see the forest come back.”

Nogues and community leaders have developed a new web site called renewbastrop.com which is providing local information on available housing, building contractors and dates on public forums to inform citizens of the latest in the clean-up operations.

Susan Wendel, director of the Bastrop Chamber of Commerce, said there is a huge community spirit in the town of 7,200. “We’re still here and we’re going to come out of this stronger,” Wendel said.

The Insurance Council of Texas initially estimated that the Bastrop fire caused at least \$150 million in insured losses. That number is expected to rise as adjusters are able to report back on the severity of the fire losses.

The Insurance Council of Texas is the largest state insurance trade association in the country consisting of approximately 500 property and casualty insurers writing business in Texas. For more information click on www.insurancecouncil.org or <http://www.facebook.com/insurancecounciloftexas>

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