



Florida Realtors holds oil spill recovery forum

FORT WALTON BEACH, Fla. – July 9, 2010 – It was standing room only at the Florida Realtors Oil Spill Recovery Town Hall Meeting hosted today at the Emerald Coast Association of Realtors. More than 130 Realtors, business leaders and area officials voiced concerns over the Gulf oil spill to BP representatives, asking tough questions about the company's claims process.

"Plug the hole is what we want and need," said 2010 Florida Realtors President Wendell Davis as he welcomed audience members and Realtors from around the state participating via the webinar. "Until that happens, we need to stand together and work through these difficult times speaking with one voice. It is my hope that these presenters today will make a difference for you. We plan to use our collective strength as the Realtor community to advocate for the right and fair solutions for you, your clients and communities."

Mike Sole, Secretary of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) discussed the ongoing oil spill cleanup and recovery efforts. DEP has been designated as the lead state agency for responding to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill along Florida's shoreline.

"They're recovering roughly 25,000 barrels a day through current efforts and that's 25,000 barrels a day not going into our waters," he said, noting that another aspect of the recovery is slated to start this weekend. "If all goes well, they'll be able to recover 40,000 to 50,000 barrels a day, and that hopefully will be about 90 percent oil."

Sole added that crews are close to the target depth for plugging the well, but the work goes more slowly when it's that close. BP has stated mid-August is the estimated time frame for plugging the well; however, he thinks the crews are ahead of schedule and could reach the required depth by the end of July.

Representing BP at the meeting were Mary Shafer Malicki, BP deputy incident commander for Florida and Liz Castro, BP governmental and public affairs.

"BP has paid \$167 million in claims," Castro said. "To date, \$28.18 million has been paid to Florida, with more than 27,000 claims. No claims have been denied."

Realtors are being reimbursed canceled contracts and lost income, Castro said, but added that many real estate related claims are on hold. She said BP is working with new claims administrator Ken Feinberg to figure out details regarding the process for those claims, but "it is a complicated process and there is no cookie-cutter answer."

John Harrell, president-elect of the Bay County Association of Realtors, said he knows 50 people who have filed claims, and none of them have been paid.

"What we're really looking for is direction from you (BP) and what you want from us," said Mary Ann Windes, president of the Emerald Coast Association of Realtors.

Florida Realtors Vice President of Public Policy John Sebree told the group that he and President Davis have been talking with Feinberg and plan to meet with him next week, adding, "That's issue No. 1 – some sort of standardized format for real estate related claims."

Drawing applause from the crowd, Mike Chesser, a real estate attorney who has been consulting with the Emerald Coast association, said, "We need some clear rules. We need to see what you're going to do. We need clear direction. Don't hide behind the statement, 'All claims are individual, and every claim is different.'"

"The point is that there are people who have been severely injured economically," said Phil Babiak, broker-owner of Century 21 Island View Realty in Navarre. "They have scratched and researched and gotten all the documentation they need to demonstrate those damages. I believe we need a review panel (for claims) that knows our industry and who will be able to advocate for us."

On behalf of BP, Castro thanked the Realtors for having the forum. "You guys are doing exactly what is needed,"

she said. "You're coming here, you're talking to us, you're explaining what is going on with your business and your companies."

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