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FEMA

December 30, 2008
DR-1810-CA NR-35
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Disaster News

DISASTER LEGAL SERVICES FREE HOTLINE

PASADENA, Calif. – A free hotline is open to provide a variety of legal services to those affected by the Southern California wildfires. The service is provided by the Young Lawyers Division of the American Bar Association in conjunction with the San Fernando Valley Bar Association and the State Bar of California, with some funding by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

The toll-free number, **1-888-500-9219**, is staffed Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. until further notice. However, it will not operate on New Year's Day.

The service provides fast basic legal advice on disaster-related issues including:

- Assistance with insurance claims
- Assistance with home repair contracts
- Counseling on landlord-tenant problems
- Counseling on mortgage-foreclosure problems
- Replacement of lost documents
- Assistance with consumer protection matters

“These are common problems encountered by people who have suffered losses in a disaster,” said Mark Neveau, federal coordinating officer. “FEMA supports this service to help assure that everyone has access to sound advice to solve basic legal issues.”

Callers do not have to be registered with FEMA, but the service is designed to answer disaster-related legal questions.

“Many potential problems are easily resolved once people understand their rights under the law,” said Tom Maruyama, deputy state coordinating officer. “If an issue is complex and a person needs to be represented by a lawyer, he or she will be advised how to obtain one.”

When there is a need for legal representation, the attorneys who provide the hotline service may be able to arrange free or low-cost counsel for those who are unable to afford normal fees.

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FEMA coordinates the federal government's role in preparing for, preventing, mitigating the effects of, responding to, and recovering from all domestic disasters, whether natural or man-made, including acts of terror.

The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES) coordinates overall state agency response to major disasters in support of local government. OES maintains the State Emergency Plan, which outlines the organizational structure for state management of the response to natural and manmade disasters. OES assists local governments and their state agencies in developing their own emergency preparedness and response plans in accordance with the Standardized Emergency Management System and the State Emergency Plan.

SBA is the federal government's primary source of money for the long-term rebuilding of disaster-damaged private property. SBA helps homeowners, renters, businesses of all sizes, and private non-profit organizations fund repairs or rebuilding efforts, and cover the cost of replacing lost or disaster-damaged personal property. These disaster loans cover uninsured and uncompensated losses and do not duplicate benefits of other agencies or organizations. For information about SBA programs, applicants may call 1-800-659-2955 (TTY 1-800-977-8339.)