

At Workshop, Residents Learn How to Go Green When Rebuilding Homes

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Nonprofit United Policyholders offered presentations to residents interested in rebuilding their homes green after the Sept. 9 pipeline explosion and showed that there is help available.

Jerry Guernsey was always talking about making his house more green.

In fact, he has considered himself green for the last 40 years, as he was known for using scrap metal to work on his classic cars and other projects around the home.

Now that he and his wife Carole are looking to rebuild from scratch after the Sept. 9 pipeline explosion destroyed their Concord Way home, going green is a strong consideration.

“Going green is a good thing,” Guernsey said. “For one, you get better air in your house.”

The Guernseys were some of the residents who sat in a workshop Thursday at the downtown San Bruno Resource and Recovery Center on green building after the disaster in the Crestmoor neighborhood.

Nonprofit United Policyholders brought in speakers from the city and Global Green USA to educate residents on the green rebuilding process so that they could learn about a more efficient way they could build their homes and an opportunity to make their lives whole again while saving money and the environment.

The emphasis throughout the workshop was that building green after the disaster is really possible and help is available.

Representatives from Global Green USA—a nonprofit that advocates for climate change solutions such as energy conservation, CO2 emission reduction and the securing of a more sustainable life—explained the green building process and how residents could benefit from their expert guidance when rebuilding.

Matt Petersen, president and CEO of the organization, said his goal is to get at least 12 homeowners to rebuild green in the neighborhood. If Global Green gets involved early enough in the process, Petersen said, the organization can make sure each home becomes energy efficient and each resident becomes less reliant on the source of the disaster: PG&E.

“Wouldn’t it be something if you wouldn’t have to pay PG&E anything more than a monthly service

charge?” Petersen asked the residents in the workshop.

Global Green has some initial funding from the Silicon Valley Community Foundation to launch the program, and it is working on getting more funding from businesses such as YouTube and Gap, Petersen said.

While going green sounds good and seems simple, the underlying factor for many folks—who have already been burdened by insurance claims, rental homes and a whole host of other things that have disrupted their lives over the last nine months—will still likely be cost.

After all, going green doesn’t mean spending less money—at least at the beginning.

That is why United Policyholders brought in Jacques Lord, a survivor of the 2007 San Diego wildfires whose home was one of 1,600 destroyed.

Out of the thousands of homeowners who lost their homes during that disaster, he and his family were one of only three that decided to rebuild green.

The reason he believes so many people opted for rebuilding the old-fashioned way was because the green building process is simple but not easy. Lord said he learned that the hard way, after not initially contracting with a green builder and being forced to fork out nearly \$10,000 in legal fees to fight him in court.

But he learned some valuable lessons: Establish ground rules with your family first. Then educate yourself, your designer and builder, or just get a packaged deal like the one Global Green is offering. Even if cost is a problem, Lord said, residents can still do something green like installing LED lights or energy efficient appliance to make a difference in their energy bills and lives.

“With anything you do, that’s great,” he said. “Don’t feel bad about it.”

That’s the predicament the Guernseys might be in because their insurance will likely not cover the extra costs needed to get Leadership in Environmental Engineering and Design, or LEED, certification, which is the gold-standard for ensuring a home is green.

But Jerry Guernsey said he’s not losing sight of his goal. If they rebuild green, he knows “our home will be a better home,” he said.