

Help is on the way for Waldo victims

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With the Waldo Canyon Fire having wiped out 345 homes last summer, it appears Colorado Springs and El Paso County are working on ways to help homeowners figure out how to work with their insurance companies and prepare for the next disaster.

First, the latter. Last night, roughly 300 people packed Cheyenne Mountain High School auditorium to hear the city lay out suggestions for preparing for evacuations and how to mitigate flammable materials around homes to retard fire spread in the future.

Tips for evacuations:

Put together a 72-hour kit containing everything you need to live outside your home, such as phones, clothing, medicine, and other essentials.

Take important documents with you, including birth certificates, passports, insurance policies and bank statements. Also, constantly review your policies for adequate coverage, including replacement value.

Make an inventory of your possessions and video your home if possible.

Home businesses should back up data at an off-site area.

Share your cell phone number with your homeowner association or neighbors so you can be reached quickly.

Back the car into the garage for a quick departure, but make sure you know how to open your garage door if the power goes out.

Depart in one car, not multiple cars so your family stays together.

Those with disabilities should call 211 to get on a list of those needing assistance in evacuations.

Sign up your cell phone for reverse 911 calls by going to <http://www.elpasoteller911.org/>

It's important to be ready, says city Emergency Operations Manager Bret Waters, because, "Pre-evacuation notices may not always be issued prior to mandatory evacuations."

Christina Randall, who oversees wildland fire mitigation programs for the Colorado Springs Fire Department, says it costs \$900 to \$2,400 per acre to mitigate against fire threat. With 28,800 acres in the city in the wildland-urban interface, the city needs all the help it can get. Randall urged residents to do their own mitigation. She reminded the crowd the city has 36,485 addresses and 91,200 people in the

threat area.

But the city can help. She said if a dozen neighbors get together to mitigate, they can schedule the city's chipper to come by and take away the slash. For information, call her at 385-7368.

The county also is lining up help for homeowners.

"Many Mountain Shadows residents got their claim checks and have started to rebuild or repair their homes but others, especially those with homes that were damaged but not destroyed, are getting little help and a lot of red tape from their insurance carriers," Commissioner Sallie Clark says in a news release.

"They have warped windows that don't open and close properly. They are living with soot in the attic and smoke and heat damage throughout their homes and they are having a difficult time trying to get their property back to the way it was before the fire."

Clark says anyone experiencing trouble with insurance claims can turn to United Policyholders, an organization that received grant funding from the Colorado 2012 Fire Relief Fund specifically to help victims of Colorado's Waldo Canyon and High Park fires.

The agency offers information and advocacy services to insurance consumers in all 50 states and does not accept funding from insurance companies. To begin, fill out an online questionnaire at:

www.uphelp.org/survey

In addition to claims assistance services, United Policyholders can also help homeowners to review policies and better understand the coverage available through the National Flood Insurance Program.