Poizner Hails Recovery From Fires, Says Most Claims Are Resolved

http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/2009/nov/10/poizner-hails-recovery-fires-says…

ESCONDIDO — Standing in front of an Escondido home that rose from the ashes of the 2007 wildfires, California Insurance Commissioner Steve Poizner said yesterday that the pain of post-fire recovery and rebuilding has finally ended for most of the victims.

Poizner, who is running for governor, said 99 percent of the 40,000 insurance claims filed by homeowners whose houses burned down or were damaged by Southern California wildfires in 2007 have been resolved, and that homeowners have received insurance payments totaling $2.3 billion.

In San Diego County, where 1,650 homes were destroyed and 200,000 acres burned in the Witch Creek fire, the state Department of Insurance helped 400 victims who asked for its intervention secure an additional $27 million from their insurance companies.

Poizner held the news conference in front of Keith and Kathie Browning's 3,900-square-foot home to give a second-anniversary report of the Witch Creek fire.

He underscored his department's success, although he acknowledged that more needs to be done.

Keith Browning, 62, agreed that the Department of Insurance helped him greatly, but said that, unlike other fire victims, he had help from friends who knew how to navigate the insurance system and the construction industry.

In Rancho Bernardo, which suffered the heaviest losses in San Diego from the Witch Creek fire, residents had a different take on post-fire recovery.

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Valerie Brown, project coordinator for RB United, a coalition helping fire victims, said at least 70 people still have not obtained permits to rebuild.

Karen Reimus, disaster recovery coordinator for the nonprofit United Policyholders, which educates consumers about their insurance rights, said Poizner still has not fulfilled his promise to audit 2007 wildfire insurance claims so that his department could make it easier for future victims.

Darrel Ng, Poizner's press secretary, said the audit on larger insurers is being finalized.

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