Regional News

Washington State Housing Agency Offers Help to Mudslide Victims

by Tonya Chin
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LOS ANGELES - The Washington State Housing Finance Commission is helping victims of the devastating Oso mudslide to more quickly access emergency housing.

The agency issued a waiver that allows people displaced by the mudslide who earn less than 60% of the area's median income to skip several steps when applying for tax-credit apartments.

They may remain in the new housing through July 31 before having to reapply to meet the normal requirements.

"Like everyone in the state, we grieve for the tragedy in Oso and for those who have been through so much," said Karen Miller, chair of the Housing Finance Commission. "We're glad we can do something to help."

The mudslide occurred on March 22 in Snohomish County, 55 miles north Seattle, when a portion of an unstable hill collapsed.

Mud and debris destroyed a residential neighborhood and covered about a square mile of land. More than 30 people were killed in the aftermath, with at least 10 still missing or unaccounted for.

Families who have lost their homes may apply for the WSHFC tax-credit housing by simply self-certifying that their income is under the limits, instead of providing proof.

"The first step should be to call the property you're interested in to ask about vacancies, and to make sure your gross annual income makes you eligible," said Melissa Donahue, manager of the Commission's Asset Management and Compliance division.

Families will still pay rent, and background or credit checks may still be required.

But the waiver will save families up to a week of certifications and paperwork, removing one barrier for displaced families seeking temporary homes, the agency said.

A similar waiver was used in 2005 by the Housing Finance Commission to assist people displaced by Hurricane Katrina.

The WSHFC was created in 1983 to act as a financial conduit to issue revenue bonds and participate in housing programs to help provide affordable housing throughout the state.

The agency provides developers and nonprofit organizations with access to tax-exempt bond financing and low-income housing tax credits for multifamily, nonprofit, and senior housing.

The agency had approximately $3.5 billion of outstanding bonds and notes as of June 30, 2013.