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*“No act
of kindness,
however small,
is ever wasted.”*

~Aesop

Moving Forward: What to Do in the Aftermath of Hurricane Irene

The winds and rains of Hurricane Irene may have subsided, but the storm continues to disrupt and devastate the lives of thousands of Garden State residents. As a concerned neighbor who wants to help families and business with the recovery process, the New Jersey Association of REALTORS® (NJAR®) has assembled helpful information on how to access government resources following the hurricane. The disaster recovery information is posted on www.REALstoryNJ.com.

First things first, before you can begin to apply for the myriad of government programs available to natural disaster victims, you must report the damage to your insurance company. If your property damage is not covered by your insurance company you may be eligible for assistance under the Small Business Administration (SBA) or the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

The federal government has created the website www.disasterassistance.gov to serve as the ultimate resource for disaster relief programs. The website consolidates information about federally funded government assistance to disaster victims. You can apply for FEMA assistance and SBA loans through a single online application, which reduces the number of forms you have to fill out and shortens the time it takes to apply for aid.

FEMA has a variety of disaster relief programs available to eligible individuals, including: rental assistance for temporary housing; grants to repair property damage not covered by insurance; grants to help meet medical, dental, funeral, transportation, and other serious disaster-related needs not covered by insurance; and unemployment payments for temporary job losses caused by a major disaster. To learn more about the programs offered by FEMA, call the **Disaster Helpline at 1-800-621-FEMA (3362)**.

The Small Business Administration, despite the agency's name, is also an excellent resource for homeowners hurt by the storm. SBA provides low-interest disaster loans to homeowners, renters, businesses of all sizes and private, nonprofit organizations to repair or replace real estate, personal property, equipment, inventory and business assets that have been damaged or destroyed in a disaster. For more information on the programs offered by SBA, visit www.sba.gov.

Beyond the assistance disaster victims may receive through FEMA and SBA, you also may be eligible for a tax refund or deduction. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) is providing tax relief to individual and business taxpayers impacted by Hurricane Irene. Remember to keep documentation to prove that a loss is attributed to a specific disaster. It is always best to seek the advice of a tax professional, as rules regarding casualty losses are complex and can change. For more information, visit www.irs.gov.

NJAR® is more than a trade association that exists to serve the real estate needs of our members. NJAR® is an active community partner who is ready to assist those in need. REALTORS® have a legacy of giving and are committed to “Bringing Help Home.” In fact, the REALTORS® Relief Foundation was established to help citizens recover from hurricanes, tsunamis, floods, wildfires, and other major disasters. In the ten years since it was created, REALTORS® have given more than \$22 million in relief to victims of disaster. If you are interested in helping ensure the victims of Hurricane Irene are not forced to lose their homes, please consider making a tax deductible donation today. Contributions can be made online or made by check and mailed to: REALTORS® Relief Foundation, c/o NAR, 430 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60611. ■