



Emerald Coast Association of REALTORS®



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ECAR Hosts Florida Realtors Oil Spill Town Hall

(Emerald Coast, Fla) – The Emerald Coast Association of Realtors (ECAR) hosted the Florida Realtors Oil Spill Town Hall meeting Friday, July 9. Realtors and local officials met to learn the status of recovery efforts, information from BP on the claims process, and the legislative efforts of Florida Realtors with the upcoming special session.

The meeting was conducted by Florida Realtors President Wendell Davis and moderated by John Sebree, Vice President of Public Policy for Florida Realtors. Realtors from Escambia to Bay counties attended and Realtor Associations from across Florida joined the meeting via the internet. Local officials attended, including Representatives Matt Gaetz and Dave Murzin, and property appraisers from across Northwest Florida.

President Davis reiterated the point that everyone, regardless of their industry, can agree upon, “Plug the hole!” He reminded Realtors that they need to “stand together through these difficult times. Today we’re here to listen, and we’re here to learn, so we can speak with one voice.”

“We [Florida Realtors] plan to use the collective strength as the Realtor community to advocate for the right and fair solutions for you, your clients, and community,” continued President Davis.

Mike Sole, Secretary of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) updated the audience on the oil recovery efforts. “Tomorrow [July 10] is an important day,” stated Sole, “out at the well site as they are looking to implement...the Helix Producer, the next element to recovery efforts.” Once in place, the Helix Producer will potentially recover an additional 20 to 25,000 barrels of oil a day, bringing the total to approximately 40 to 50,000 barrels of oil recovered each day, or about 90%. Sole reminded the crowd that any amount of recovered oil is a good thing because it’s less oil spewing into the Gulf.

BP Representatives Mary Shafer Maliki, Deputy Incident Commander and Liz Castro, Governmental and Public Affairs were on hand to explain the claims process to the Realtors. Maliki spoke about BP’s presence in Florida, explaining that there are branch locations working with the different counties and their specific needs, county liaisons who work to make sure county officials have the information they need, operational people who are on site at all times



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checking on the clean-up effort, and of course, the claims adjusters for residents and businesses filing claims. “My job description is to make it happen [in Florida]...which means cleaning, claims, and communications,” stated Maliki. She reassured the audience that BP wants to make it right, and her job is to do that here in Florida.

Liz Castro, BP Director of Civic Affairs outlined the claims process, encouraging Realtors and anyone else with a claim to call or go online to start the claims process. She reminded everyone that each claim is different and a claims adjuster would be able to explain the specific documentation needed to process the claim.

When asked to speak directly about real estate related claims, Castro stated, “Under OPA [the Oil Protection Act], for right now, the claims being paid to Realtors are only on cancelled contracts and those commissions...and the properties they [BP] are paying claims for must be within one block of the beach.” Castro cautioned that the claims process could and would change as the transition from BP to Kenneth Feinberg’s Gulf Coast Claims Facility.

The surprise at this statement was best represented by Audie Street, broker of Keller Williams Pensacola, during the question and answer portion of the meeting. “I think there is a communication problem here. CPAs talk well with other CPAs. Attorneys talk well with other attorneys. Real estate agents talk well with other real estate agents. BP doesn’t have any real estate understanding on their side. The statement that only a house within a block of the water would qualify for a claim shocked me.”

Street went on to explain to Castro and Maliki that agents not making even one or two sales within a year could impact their individual business by 30% or more. Those agents may then decide to leave the industry, meaning any transactions they might have closed would be gone, too, further impacting the broker’s business. “None of that has anything to do with one house a block from the water,” he stated.

Mike Chesser, local attorney with Chesser & Barr, PA, spoke eloquently on behalf of Realtors. He made it clear to the representatives from BP that while he was capable of filing lawsuits on behalf of his Realtor clients, he did not relish the idea and encouraged his clients to hold off and let BP do what they can. “Here’s what I ask of BP: Please try to not make a fool of me when I say to my clients, ‘Don’t file a lawsuit, yet. Try to let these guys do what they say they’re going to do. Let’s follow the claims process.’”

He encouraged BP to create rules and guidelines so Realtors would know exactly how they needed to submit their claims and which claims would be considered. He chastised BP for using the statement that every claim is unique and they must all be considered differently. Earlier in the meeting Castro pointed out that no claims have been denied, but several Realtors pointed out that their claims had been on hold indefinitely.

Chesser spoke about Florida’s lottery system and that the state touts that a lot of money is paid out even though everyone knows only one or two lucky people are the recipients. “I don’t want BP to be a lottery system. I don’t want these people [Realtors] to sit out here and submit claims



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and occasionally some will be awarded, even though we're [BP] not going to tell you just why or when."

Maliki and Castro thanked everyone who spoke or had questions about the claims process for their input and admitted this was the kind of information they were looking for. John Sebree assured everyone that he and Wendell Davis would be meeting with Kenneth Feinberg in the next few days and would work with Feinberg to help create a set of guidelines for Realtors to follow in the claims process and to impress upon him the impact the oil spill has had upon the real estate industry in Florida.

For more information about filing a claim and or to watch the video from the town hall, go to EmeraldCoastRealtors.com/oilspill.

The Emerald Coast Association of Realtors is a not-for-profit trade association with over 2300 members. The mission of the Emerald Coast Association of Realtors is to assist all members in promoting their success through education, marketing, and member services.

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