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RIBA responds to RI's spring 2010 flood crisis

May 12, 2010 - Rhode Island

After the record-breaking rains and flooding of March and April, the Rhode Island Builders Association has been providing information to the public, as well as educating members on the special considerations of decontamination issues when dealing with floodwater and mold restoration.

Complicating the public outreach are distressed homeowners and the large numbers of unscrupulous contractors, from both in-state and out-of-state, who inevitably follow in the wake of such a disaster.

George Whalen, executive director of the R.I. Contractors' Registration and Licensing Board (CRLB), told The Rhode Island Builder Report that hundreds of out-of-state contractors, some from as far away as Texas and Oklahoma, have descended on state offices in search of permission to do recovery work in Rhode Island.

"We don't require testing, so the process to get registered is relatively easy. We realize that our own contractors need the work, but at the same time, there are homeowners out there in desperate need," Whalen said.

Last week, new registrations averaged 50 or more per day, Whalen said. The usual number is about five.

"With this influx, we have increased enforcement and education to assure that consumers are protected, but also that the system works in a timely fashion. In that most of these applicants are corporations, they have to go through our secretary of state to get documentation from their own states, which can take some extra time," said Whalen.

It seems clear that recovery will take a long time and that there is plenty of work to be done.

Disaster assistance is available for Rhode Islanders in all five counties who suffered losses related to storms and flooding beginning on March 12th.

Disaster officials with the R.I. Emergency Management Agency (RIEMA) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) urge people with uninsured or underinsured losses to register for help by May 28th.

Rhode Islanders may register online at www.fema.gov or by calling FEMA at (800) 621-3362.

RIBA members interested in doing residential recovery work can start by visiting www.floodrecovery.ri.gov. This site provides an overview of the situation town by town, including where the damage is, sources for assistance and further information, and even warnings against contractor scams.

Paul Eno is the owner and editor-in-chief of New River Press, Woonsocket and is the editor of the monthly RIBA newsletter, The Rhode Island Builder Report.

