Task force recommends improvements in Oregonâ€™s construction environment

by Bend Weekly News Sources

A task force charged with seeking ways to protect homeowners from construction defects and ensure affordable liability insurance for contractors recently released a report with its findings including 11 recommendations.

The Construction Claims Task Force (CCTF), composed of nine members who represent the public, the insurance and construction industries, and the Oregon Department of Energy, studied issues relating to home construction defects and construction insurance. Two state agencies, the Construction Contractors Board and the Department of Consumer and Business Services, Building Codes Division and Insurance Division coordinated task force activities, and provided data and expertise. The task force was created by the 2005 Legislature.

Highlights of the final recommendations include:

** Changing building code requirements to prevent moisture intrusion;

** Strengthening the state Construction Contractors Boardâ€™s enforcement to address defective construction;

** Establishing a limited consumer assistance fund to provide relief to consumers;

** Streamlining rate filing requirements for contractor group general liability insurance policies; and

** Encouraging construction insurance carriers to provide discounts for contractors who adopt the task forceâ€™s recommendations and who perform other best practices.

â€œInput from the public contributed greatly to the task forceâ€™s work,â€• said Cory Streisinger, director of the Department of Consumer and Business Services. â€œThe task force heard from consumers who have experienced problems with home construction and from industry experts, which was key in developing the 11 recommendations that will help reduce construction defects, enhance contractor accountability, improve consumer confidence, and ensure the availability of contractor insurance.â€•

After numerous meetings over a 16-month period, CCTF Chair Eric Grasberger, a Portland attorney representing consumers, is satisfied with the solutions recommended to help consumers, especially the recommendation that would require competency training and certification for those who work on a building's exterior envelope, such as siding, windows, doors, and roofs.

â€œA large number of consumer complaints stem from unskilled and unsupervised workmanship on the envelope,â€• he said. â€œIncreased education and training requirements â€” with companies subject to licensing sanctions for noncompliance â€” should reduce the number of problems consumers face.â€•

He said the limited recovery fund also would be good for consumers, alleviating â€œsome of the stingâ€• from construction defects caused by contractors who may not have the ability to pay for their mistakes.

â€œIâ€™m very proud of the work performed by the task force members and staff who worked many hours,â€• said Craig Smith, administrator of the stateâ€™s Construction Contractors Board. â€œCCB is excited about these task force recommendations, which, in total, will provide enhanced protections for consumers and improvements to tools used by the agency to hold contractors accountable for their business practices.â€•

The entire CCTF report, with an executive summary, recommendations plus data and analysis, is available at the Building Codes Divisionâ€™s Web site at http://egov.oregon.gov/DCBS/CCTF/. Click on â€œFinal Legislative Report.â€•

The Building Codes Division, part of the Department of Consumer & Business Services, provides services to the construction industry to help ensure the safe and effective construction of structures in Oregon. For more information, visit www.bcd.oregon.gov.

The Insurance Division, part of the Department of Consumer & Business Services, helps ensure the financial soundness of insurers, the fair treatment of consumers, and the affordability and availability of insurance products. For more information, go to www.insurance.oregon.gov.

The Department of Consumer and Business Services is Oregonâ€™s largest business regulatory and consumer protection agency. For more information, visit www.dcbs.oregon.gov.

The Construction Contractors Board is the state agency tasked with holding nearly 45,000 construction contractors financially accountable for the services they provide to the public. For more information, visit www.oregon.gov/CCB.

The Oregon Department of Energy provides information, demonstrates new technologies and offers a variety of programs to encourage Oregonians to conserve energy and invest in renewable resources. For more information, visit www.oregon.gov/energy.

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