



Archives

Mobilizing

GOLD BEACH, OREGON - Something important is about to happen in Curry County, nearly 2,000 square miles of forests and farms in the southwest corner of Oregon, bordered by California to the south, the Pacific Ocean to the west.

Some 3,876 Curry County families live in mobile homes. That's a big chunk of its housing stock - about one in every four homes.

Seventy percent of the mobile homes are in pretty good shape, with maybe a few "honey do" improvements or repairs, but nothing threatening life or limb. Not so for the other 30 percent. "We appear," said County Commissioner David Itzen, "to have a very high number of homes with structural issues, indoor moisture, mold, faulty wiring, poor insulation and other issues."



Mobile homerepair

Like Charlotte White's home off US 101 just north of Brookings. She's 64 and retired, living in a single-wide built in 1976, reported Amelia Templeton of NPR's Earth Fix. Its floors are rotting, "mold has developed somewhere deep in the walls" and the insulation is so "minimal" that she spends up to 70 percent of her monthly \$400 Social Security check for utilities. "White's home was not built to last three decades," Templeton concludes.

And that's true for a lot of homes built before 1976, the year HUD first established construction and safety standards for manufactured homes. HUD's standards, Templeton says, have "dramatically improved" the quality of manufactured homes.

Homes manufactured before 1976 aren't covered. "When they've outlived their life cycle and they begin to break down," Annette Klinefelter of the Curry County Public Health Department told Templeton, "the water enters, the dust mites enter and the vermin enter. It results in indoor air problems that impact people's health," she says.

Unhealthy homes lead to unhealthy families, "I have not talked to one person who lives in a manufactured home who doesn't have an upper respiratory problem," she told *The Curry County Pilot*.

Easy fix, right? The residents should pay for the repairs. Unfortunately, like Karen White, many families living in mobile homes are on fixed or very low incomes. There's not much cash left over each month, especially for better windows or insulation.

Which is why, the County Commission requested and, in February, Governor Kitzhaber okayed designation of the Curry County Housing Stock Upgrade Initiative as an Oregon Solutions project to form a team of "public, private and civic partners" to produce "a viable financing package" for repair or replacement of existing mobile homes with "energy efficient, safer and more valuable" homes.

By July an impressive team gathered in Gold Beach, the county seat, with representatives from Curry County, Oregon Solutions, NeighborWorks Umpqua, USDA Rural Development, Coos-Curry Electric Cooperative, Oregon Housing and Community Services, Oregon Coast Community Action, Curry Home Builders Association, Leisure Land Homes, Business Oregon, Network for Oregon Affordable Housing, Oregon Health Authority, Oregon Manufactured Housing Association, Rural Community Assistance Corporation, Bonneville Power Administration, Northwest Energy Works, Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley and, yes, HUD.

Even better, they unveiled a plan - ReHome Oregon - to be administered by NeighborWorks Umpqua. Beginning in 2014, it will provide loans and small grants to those who own both their home and the land on which it's sited to substantially repair or, even, replace their homes. The benefits could be huge. "One family replaced their 1968 mobile home -and their \$600 monthly heating bill - with a brand new model," ReHome Oregon explains on its Web site. "They now pay \$600 for their mortgage, groceries and heating combined."

"If we start replacing battered houses, put people in new homes, get people back to work and improve health," Karen Chase of Oregon Housing and Community Services told *The Pilot*, "it blows my mind."

And, potentially, lots of others beyond Curry County. Some 360,000 families live in mobile homes across Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington. If, like in Curry County, almost a third of them face "serious health, safety and livability

issues," that's 120,000 families with a stake in whether Re-Home Oregon succeeds. 'Cause if it work for Curry County, it might work for the place they call home.

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