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Center offering flood victims options for coping, rebuilding

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FORKS TWP. | The opening day of the Federal Emergency Management Agency disaster recovery center drew more than nine flood victims Friday. Organizers hope for a higher turnout in coming days.

Headquartered in the Forks Plaza shopping center, the hub offered residents resources to cope with the June flood.

Nine people sought help during the afternoon, and several more arrived in the evening, although an exact count will not be available until today. Officials urge anyone who experienced flooding in their home to apply for federal aid.

"Not everyone is eligible, but anyone who had any type of damage should apply to see if they are eligible," said FEMA disaster recovery center manager Patricia Pavel.

How long the center will remain open hinges on the number of applicants for disaster assistance, Pavel said. Following a 2004 flood, the center remained open for about three weeks, she said.

Representatives gave advice on disinfecting wells and cleaning up mold. A counselor was on hand to help victims work through grief. Sadness, anger and fear the river will strike again are emotions residents have expressed, said John D. Weaver, the county's disaster mental health coordinator.

"But the good news is: Most people are resilient," he said. "They do come out stronger and tougher in the long run."

Bangor resident Ralph Falcone, 83, went to the center to get information he needs to start on his insurance claim.

Falcone estimates his brick house on Del Haven Road sustained \$80,000 in damage when water filled the bottom two floors.

One couple wanted to fix problems they encountered after flooding wrecked their home on Canal Road in Williams Township in April 2005.

Helen Repsher, 85, said she and her husband hit red tape trying to rebuild their home. She's upset with the township for failing to award a permit to rebuild the house.

"I felt a ray of hope in talking to some of these people today," Repsher said after speaking with officials at the command center. "I'm hoping they can say, 'OK. Let's get this township moving.' "

Zoning Officer Rich Adams said rules in the zoning district where their home stands have changed after it was built. As a result of those changes, the couple must win a special exception from the zoning hearing board to rebuild, Adams said.

The zoning officials recently awarded the special exception with several conditions, he said. However, the couple failed to comply with a condition requiring them to consolidate two of their parcels of land, Adams said.

Since the flood, the couple has been living in a trailer in Raubsville, and Helen Repsher said medical problems have plagued her.

"It's been rough," she said. "It's been really rough."

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