

## **Local builders eye piece of the pie: May be involved in rebuilding in areas damaged by wildfires**

Prince George Citizen

Saturday, September 20, 2003

Page: 3

Section: Second Front

Byline:

Source: The Citizen

A co-ordinated approach to rebuilding homes destroyed by this summer's wildfires could match Kelowna-area homeowners with available labour in Prince George, says the B.C. Construction Association.

The association is calling for the establishment of a reconstruction agency that would identify regions whose contractors, suppliers and labourers need work, and line them up with about 250 families who want their homes rebuilt, said president Michael Geoghegan. "We want to make sure work that's done is done in a proper manner by qualified people, and that people aren't waiting three to four years for their homes to be rebuilt," he said.

Geoghegan suggested the co-ordinator could be funded through a portion of the disaster relief money promised by the federal government. A co-ordinator could also ensure desperate homeowners don't become the victims of price-gouging by opportunistic contractors or suppliers, he said.

"I think Prince George is one of the few regions where there may be some excess capacity" to take on work, Geoghegan said. "So I think Prince George could be key in reconstruction efforts and a co-ordinator could help those companies in identifying opportunities," he said.

Allen Creuzot, past president of the Prince George Homebuilders' Association, said he's already been contacted by individuals affected by the fires in Kelowna, who want him to construct homes. "It's a very good possibility," he said of his going to the Okanagan. But he noted that it might take a while for insurance claims to be settled.

However, he said there aren't a lot of companies in the Prince George area available for work in the Okanagan. That's because many have already accepted contracts elsewhere, in Vancouver and Alberta, for example, he said. "Right now, the Prince George contractors and builders are actually running pretty thin. Because of the lack of economic activity in the residential construction sector, a lot of the trades have gone," said Creuzot, who spent most of the summer doing work in Vancouver. Sub-contractors, such as plumbers, electricians, and siding workers, might be able to help fill the void in the Okanagan, though, he said.

Creuzot, who's also second vice-president of the B.C. branch of the Canadian Home Builders' Association, said the CHBA is also considering the possibility of a reconstruction co-ordinator. "Our biggest concern is making sure builders and trades that go in there are going to be qualified people," he said. "The other thing we want to do is try to make sure the work stays at least in B.C."