

# Roof reimbursement program not adding up

By Kathryn Reed

Nancy Gaynor has been waiting nine months for a check to arrive from Lake Valley Fire Protection District. This is three months longer than what was promised to be the absolute deadline. And the latest word is that it could be a couple more months, maybe longer.

The South Lake Tahoe woman is one of the 366 homeowners participating in the shake roof rebate program.

The grant through FEMA allowed homeowners in Lake Valley, South Lake Tahoe and Meeks Bay fire districts to be reimbursed 70 percent, up to \$7,500, to get rid of their fire hazard roof for something more fire resistant like a composite roof.

Applications were taken two years ago, with 2014 being the first building season and 2015 being the final year of the grant.

The problem is that of the 231 roofs that were completed last year, 108 of those residents are still waiting to be paid.

“We are getting smaller chunks of money than we anticipated. We are pretty caught up right now. It’s not overwhelming right now like it has been,” Terri Tucker, coordinator for the program, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

But still, nearly half of the people who got roofs last year have not been reimbursed.

Tucker called people “impatient”.

Lake Valley’s board members, though, see there is a problem and at their last meeting agreed to front \$200,000 to speed up

the process, according to spokeswoman Leona Allen.

“It’s not a program that is living up to its promises. It sounds like a really good deal, so a lot of us bought into it,” Gaynor told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The homeowner must qualify for the program, use one of the nearly 30 roofers who were certified by Lake Valley, pay the roofer and then submit paperwork to be reimbursed.

Gaynor took out a loan to cover the cost of her nearly \$9,000 roof. The expectation was that it would be paid off in three months, with the bulk coming from the reimbursement check.

While she is grateful to have the new roof, had she known there would be any question about a prompt reimbursement, she likely would have figured out a different way to front the money than to be paying interest on a loan.

“What is disheartening is that you are told one thing and nothing happens,” Gaynor said.

Lake Valley officials say it’s not their fault the money isn’t flowing.

“They will get their money. It is guaranteed. It’s a very cumbersome process,” Allen told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We recognize it is a slower process than we imagined. The money is coming from FEMA, they send it through Cal-EMA.”

But neither Allen nor Tucker could explain the hold up other than to say it’s government and then pointed to how long it took people to get paid by FEMA after Hurricane Katrina.

The point of the grant was to get as many people as possible to have a more fire safe roof, which in turn protects neighborhoods. People in the program also had to have their defensible space done. From that standpoint, as well as keeping roofers busy for two seasons – making it an economic boon, the fire folks say the grant has been successful.