

FEMA review pending

Federal official calls audit 'routine'

by John Draper

A Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) official has downplayed the importance of his agency's upcoming investigation in Mount Vernon.

Chuck Steele, director of natural and technological hazards with FEMA's Seattle office, reported last week an upcoming investigation of Mount Vernon building practices is routine.

"Last year we performed the same type of thing," he said, "in 50 to 60 Washington communities."

Two FEMA officials will arrive sometime this month to look over the city's building records and see if the city has been requiring elevation about the 100-year flood level for new construction.

Such elevation is required as part of the federal flood insurance program. In order to receive flood insurance payments, the city must enforce FEMA's building

elevation requirements.

Steele said that if FEMA finds a pattern of non-compliance with these requirements, the city could be taken off the flood insurance program if it refuses to comply. This would mean citizens could not get flood insurance and therefore could not get housing loans from federally insured organizations.

Ron Maynock, Mount Vernon building official, said he doubts the city will be taken off the insurance program. He guessed FEMA would only require the city to adopt an ordinance outlining the FEMA regulations to be enforced.

Maynock explained the city now only has a resolution outlining these regulations and no ordinance. He said Steele was surprised to find this out at a meeting here last month with city officials.