

# City official blasts feds for 'blackmail'

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MOUNT VERNON — The City of Mount Vernon is "caught between a rock and a hard spot," according to Ron Maynock, city building official.

Speaking at Thursday's regular Mount Vernon Chamber of Commerce meeting, Maynock told about his discussions with two officials of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The FEMA officials were here this week to conduct an audit on Mount Vernon's floodplain

buildings.

Maynock claimed that FEMA has shown a "blatant disregard for people in the county or what we can live with."

His complaint stems from what he sees as "blackmail" by the federal agency. Maynock said FEMA has told Skagit County that either it convert to an expensive federal flood insurance plan that doesn't provide adequate coverage, or it will be denied flood insurance and be blacklisted from federal grants and loans, disaster

assistance or federal mortgage insurance.

"They (FEMA) have the power to literally kill this valley," Maynock said.

He explained that the current emergency program requires a total annual cost of \$160 for existing homes one foot below the 100-year flood plain. Owners of new homes below the one-foot level would be required to pay \$284 for the "regular" FEMA program. Maynock noted, however, that most houses in Mount Vernon are one to 12 feet below

the flood plain level.

"They (FEMA officials) tell me they're not concerned about the money they take in. They're concerned about life and safety," Maynock said. "I see their prime motivation (as trying to) line their pockets."

Property that would not be covered by the regular plan, Maynock said, include: crops, motor vehicles and livestock. He added that damage that is the result of a 100-year flood caused by rain, snow, sleet or hail would not be covered by the insurance plan.

If the county is required to comply with FEMA's regulations, a building permit would cost "thousands" of dollars, Maynock said. Utilities installed underground, such as telephone, electrical and gas lines, would no longer be allowed in the floodplain.

Maynock advised the chamber audience to express their views to the Mount Vernon City Council. Mount Vernon residents have the option of telling FEMA to "take a hike," although he said he was not endorsing that view.