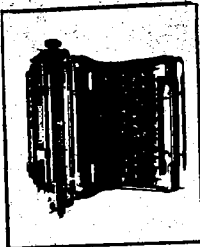


# Byline, Argus

*Comment & Opinion*



**FEMA's fame spreads;  
see agency in action Thursday**

Officials from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) are busy these days making a name for themselves.

From discussion of nuclear war relocation plans on CBS's 60 Minutes program to "Why we are here tonight" lectures in Mount Vernon City Hall chambers, FEMA officials are grabbing the attention of a growing number of Americans.

We can afford locally to shelve further discussion of the disaster relocation plan for now, but the FEMA clock is ticking louder and louder as Mount Vernon city officials approach a July 1 deadline to comply with the agency's flood insurance construction regulations.

In a presentation last week at a public meeting in Mount Vernon, two FEMA officials outlined the history of their agency and described the intent of the federal government's flood insurance program.

The program, they emphasized at one point, was established only because few people were interested in flood insurance until after their property had been destroyed.

In order to assist those affected by floods, the federal government kindly stepped in and established a subsidized assistance program.

Now, however, comes the hitch.

The program is no longer viewed by federal officials as a subsidized program. Instead, the mandate is that the program — that is, its primarily involuntary taxpayer clients — will now pay its own way.

The "voluntary" program of "subsidized" flood insurance is neither voluntary or subsidized.

The Argus believes that regardless of the intent of the federal flood insurance program, citizens of Skagit County deserve more than the options of 1) compliance or 2) severe economic consequences.

Mount Vernon city officials face a difficult decision in the coming weeks and they are rightfully frustrated by a lack of choices on behalf of their constituents.

FEMA's activities involve communities throughout this state. The agency, its officials and its programs deserve serious attention from not only local officials, but our Washington, D.C. representatives as well.

The "no choice" situation faced by Skagit County officials is unacceptable.

Our numbers may be few when viewed on a regional or national basis, but we can make ourselves heard if we express our concerns together. A solid show of public sentiment at Mount Vernon's council hearing Thursday night is an excellent place to display such concern.

— S.H.B.

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