

# City officials to discuss dispute with FEMA

28-027  
1-20-82

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**MOUNT VERNON** — Mount Vernon Mayor Ruth Gidlund and other city officials will be meeting with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) representatives tomorrow to discuss disputed floodplain construction regulations.

The City of Mount Vernon has been ordered to comply with FEMA regulations or lose its federal flood insurance, and after several meetings and appeals has been given one extra month to adopt an ordinance enforcing those regulations, according to FEMA official Chuck Steele.

Steele said Gidlund was notified by a letter mailed last Friday of FEMA's decision to extend the deadline for compliance from June 1 to July 1. He said the letter traces the background of the city's dealings with FEMA since 1976 when local officials were first notified of revised regulations prohibiting construction below the 100-year flood level in the floodplain.

"The city has been on notice for more than five years. That's adequate time to prepare a study. The data has been there for 10 years in one way, shape or form, but the city obviously didn't use it," Steele said in a telephone interview Monday.

Converting to the revised regulations would cost new home builders \$284 for regular FEMA flood insurance on a home built lower than one foot below the 100-year flood level, compared to \$160 presently paid for a home one foot below the level, according to City Building Official Ron Maynock. Most homes in Mount Vernon are one to 12 feet below the floodplain level, he said.

"When the regulations were revised (in 1976), the city was given six months to comply, which they did not do. By June, 1977, they should have complied — and then in March 1981 they were told again to use the elevations," Steele said. "They have been reminded several times since then, also."

The city's excuse, Steele said, was that a special ordinance to replace an existing resolution

would have to be written before the regulations could be enforced.

"Then they will have to have an ordinance. Our monitoring (early this month) revealed that builders are not required to build to the 100-flood level, and that could cost millions of dollars in flood insurance. Many of the houses were three feet below the known flood level," Steele said.

Now FEMA has given Mount Vernon an ultimatum. The city will receive official notice on June 1, 1982 that federal flood insurance will be cut off to Mount Vernon residents on July 1, 1982 if regulations are not adhered to. Federal flood insurance is the only kind of flood insurance available.

But in a speech before the Mount Vernon Chamber of Commerce earlier this month, Maynock called FEMA's tactic "blackmail" and a "blatant disregard for people in the county." He said that repercussions in ignoring the order will also include being blacklisted from federal grants and loans, disaster assistance or federal mortgage insurance.

"We are not treating Mount Vernon any different than any other community. There are 150 others in the region (Washington, Oregon and Idaho) who will also have to write an ordinance," Steele explained. He added that another 300 communities have already converted their construction requirements to comply.

Steele called making an exception for Mount Vernon "contrary to the entire intent of the program," and said that such an action would put the flood insurance fund at risk.

"We can't tolerate that kind of a situation. It's not fair to the taxpayers who support this program. Our flood level elevations are conservative. The Corps' (of Engineers) is even higher," he said.

The only other alternative that the City of Mount Vernon has is to put a moratorium on all construction in the floodplain until federal regulations are complied with, Steele said.

Mayor Gidlund would not comment on the matter before tomorrow's meeting.