

Update feds' aid: NDPer For secondary homes

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GULL LAKE — Manitoba's minister responsible for the Emergency Measures Organization says he's on side with two rural municipality reeves who want the federal disaster financial assistance program updated.

Scott Smith said the province asked Ottawa to extend the program years ago so that it covers secondary homes in addition to primary homes.

Under the current format, seasonal campers affected by weekend tornadoes would not receive financial aid if a program is established to help victims of the storm.



SCOTT SMITH

"We've brought it forward to the federal government ... and we will bring it forward again," Smith said yesterday after touring the resort community of Gull Lake with Agriculture Minister Rosann Wowchuk.

Rural Municipality of Alexander Reeve George Harbottle and Rural Municipality of St. Clements Reeve Steve Strang are asking for changes because they think the program is unfair to owners of secondary residences.

Contrary to common belief, tornadoes are not defined as "an act of God," and, therefore, are almost always covered, private insurers said. Most insurance policies include tornado damage under wind and hail coverage, said David Schioler, chief executive officer of the Insurance Brokers Association of Manitoba.

"Everybody that has insurance coverage in this case will likely have some level of damage coverage," said Schioler.

'Total losses'

John Bjornson, vice-president of marketing for Wawanesa Insurance, said at least three of his clients' homes were declared "total losses" by mid-afternoon yesterday.

Bjornson agreed it's likely most would be insured for wind damage.

But they may not be insured for their homes' current worth.

He said the average home is insured for about 15% less than its true value.

"It's not a bad idea to update (your assessment) every year, especially when the cost of rebuilding is jumping at such a fast rate," said Bjornson.

The five twisters also wracked up a hefty damage tab on vehicles.

"We're probably looking at a couple million in damages," said Manitoba Public Insurance (MPI) spokesman Brian Smiley.

Smiley said the storm resulted in nearly 200 hail damage claims in the Selkirk area.

Estimators also checked out about 30 to 40 RVs in the Lac Du Bonnet and Gull Lake area yesterday morning, the majority of which suffered "heavy destruction."

"There were a couple of RVs that were absolutely flattened," said Smiley. "Some were literally thrown 50 to 60 feet from where they were parked."