

At the Sevier County Commission meeting on March 20, 2017, updates were given regarding the wildfire recovery efforts. In addition, there were several questions about the fires and the recovery.

In regards to the night of the fires:

- The Incident Commander, the Gatlinburg Fire Chief, exercised his authority to deploy personnel and to order evacuations, and does so based on information from various sources including contact with emergency responders in the field. Voluntary and mandatory evacuations were ordered beginning at noon on Monday, November 28.
- The county mayor does not have the authority to order a county evacuation. State law and Attorney General opinions both address this issue.
- Sevier County has an Emergency Operations Plan that was recommended by the TEMA and modeled after the state emergency plan. Emergency plans are consistently updated based on new information. Each jurisdiction operates according to their own plan.

In regards to the recovery effort:

- Gatlinburg and Sevier County will hire an outside firm to conduct an after-action review of the response to the wildfires. That firm will look at actions that happened that night, and whether or not they were appropriate and what lessons can be learned. The city and county are committed to adopting appropriate, sound improvements to our emergency response plans.

- The Mountain Tough Recovery Team is being assembled, with Ellen Wilhoit as the chair. They will contact wildfire survivors to assess unmet needs. Caseworkers will work with survivors to help meet those needs.
- Grants for dislocated workers, victim witness coordinator for arson fire victims, and hydroseeding rights-of-way have all been approved.
- When the governor signs the bill, upon application of the affected property owner, 1/12 of the property taxes of the affected property will be refunded.
- Fire victims can use HUD grants and money from the East Tennessee Foundation for rental units. The THDA also has a grant to help uninsured owners build back. Sevier County has requested THDA to allow more tax credits for affordable housing in Sevier County.
- FEMA has approved funding to help uninsured homeowners who lost their homes in the fire cleanup debris on their property.
- Sevier County follows the guidelines of the Tennessee Department of Environment & Conservation when it comes to the handling of hazardous materials.
- The Appalachian Service Project is committed to rebuilding approximately 25 houses from individuals whose homes were destroyed by the fire and were uninsured.

All Sevier County citizens should express their appreciation to all of our first responders for their efforts and sacrifices during the recent crisis.