



BRIAN TAYLOR
STATE FIRE MARSHAL

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: NC Office of State Fire Marshal Statement Regarding Recent Misinformation Related to Temporary Housing Constructed to Shelter Victims of Hurricane Helene

Contact: Shannon Bullock Shannon.bullock@ncdoi.gov
Phone: [910-228-8565](tel:910-228-8565)

I am issuing this letter to provide additional clarity regarding the requirements of the North Carolina State Building Code with respect to temporary housing constructed to shelter victims of Hurricane Helene and to address misinformation that has recently circulated on social media related to those temporary structures.

Local jurisdictions, such as municipalities and boards of county commissioners, are responsible for enforcing the North Carolina State Building Codes through their local inspections departments. Building inspectors employed by local jurisdictions often request guidance from the Office of State Fire Marshal (OSFM) to assist them with interpreting and applying the requirements of the North Carolina State Building Code to the structures they inspect.

On November 5, 2024, David Rittlinger, the Division Chief of Codes and Interpretations, issued guidance to local building inspectors related to temporary housing constructed to shelter displaced families and other victims of Hurricane Helene while recovery efforts proceed. In the guidance he issued, Mr. Rittlinger correctly noted that temporary housing constructed for this purpose must meet the minimum requirements of the 2018 North Carolina State Building Code to ensure that they are safe for occupancy. Temporary shelters and dwellings that fail to meet minimum code requirements are particularly vulnerable to instability – especially in adverse weather conditions and in the absence of proper structural anchoring – and may not comply with life safety and weather protection standards, such as proper fire protection safety measures, sanitation, insulation, and waterproofing measures, which are essential for safety and comfort.

Since Hurricane Helene devastated Western North Carolina, OSFM has worked closely with local inspections departments to provide additional guidance on alternative means and methods for constructing temporary housing for Hurricane Helene victims in accordance with Section 105.1 of the 2018 North Carolina State Building Code: Administrative Codes and Policies. This alternative means and methods guidance for building inspectors assists those inspectors with evaluating the safety of temporary structures and streamlining approval for those structures that meet the intent and provisions of the 2018 North Carolina State Building Code.

Recently, unsubstantiated accounts of local and state authorities removing Hurricane Helene victims from “tiny homes” constructed by the Amish and other temporary structures have circulated on social media. OSFM has investigated these rumors – including by contacting the local inspections

OFFICE OF STATE FIRE MARSHAL

1202 MAIL SERVICE CENTER | RALEIGH NC 27699 -1202 | TEL 919.647.0000 | FAX 866.851.6508 | NCOSFM.GOV



departments alleged to have forcibly vacated North Carolinians from these structures – and determined that they are entirely without merit. As of the date of issuance of this letter, OSFM has evaluated each of the counties impacted by Hurricane Helene and found no credible evidence that any code-enforcement official has forcibly evicted any citizen of the State from any temporary structure based on its noncompliance with the 2018 North Carolina State Building Code.

Concerningly, OSFM employees have received threatening messages from individuals who believe that OSFM has participated in removing Hurricane Helene victims from temporary structures. These threats are unacceptable, especially when issued to OSFM employees who have worked tirelessly since late September to assist with recovery efforts in Western North Carolina. Members of the North Carolina Building Code Council – an agency that does not enforce the North Carolina State Building Code, but rather exists to develop changes to the code and hear appeals related to its application – have also received similar threatening messages.

I hope this letter puts an immediate stop to the further spread of misinformation related to temporary structures in Western North Carolina and the threatening messages received by OSFM staff and members of the Building Code Council, and assures the public that OSFM will continue its important work on behalf of all North Carolinians impacted by Hurricane Helene.

Respectfully,

Brian Taylor

Brian Taylor
State Fire Marshal

