



Road Home program halts title exams

Louisiana officials believe eliminating title searches could help unclog the end of the Road Home application process, where 20,000 files have been transferred to First American Title Co. but only 7,000 of them have closed.

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In a move aimed at speeding up Road Home closings, Louisiana officials halted all title examinations on applicants' homes and may permanently eliminate the step for homeowners who choose to repair their properties.

State officials believe the elimination of title searches could help unclog the end of the Road Home application process, where 20,000 files have been transferred to First American Title Co. but only 7,000 of them have closed.

Homeowners wishing to sell their properties to the state, however, still would be subject to title reviews before the sale could be closed, a state official said.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development approved the rules earlier this week and hopefully should speed up lump-sum payments of Road Home grants to homeowners opting to repair. The state agency overseeing the program also wants Washington to let it cut out some pre-closing verifications to expedite closings further for thousands of applicants.

Mike Spletto, senior housing manager for the state's Office of Community Development, was ambiguous during his testimony before the LRA board, declining to provide specifics on the plan to cut out certain pre-closing reviews.

An e-mail sent by First American to about 64 title examiners who had been performing the examinations at \$25 apiece, told examiners to turn in their final invoices by the end of business April 10.

Mike Taylor, the head of OCD's disaster recovery unit, said the title work still would be necessary on properties in which homeowners elect to sell to the state under one of the Road Home's two buyout options. Taylor said he is confident HUD will approve the proposed change, but HUD spokesman **Brian Sullivan** said the decision doesn't involve his agency.

Dropping title exams and abstract work won't speed up other bottlenecks in the process, including the thousands of unresolved complaints in ICF's resolution process and a gap of nearly 17,000 between the 64,134 applicants whose benefits have been calculated and the 46,733 who have received award letters.