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### **2011 state law meeting focus**

CHARLESTON -- The manufactured housing regulatory board will continue to promote improvement inspections over litigation in conformity with state law, the board said Wednesday.

Members of the Manufactured Housing Construction and Safety Standards board were also assured by its staff that state inspectors will be properly trained to protect the public and also to adhere to proper standards in their inspectors.

At issue was clarification of how the State Board implements a 2011 law that requires all complaints against the industry be taken first to the regulatory board set up to hear consumer complaints. Consumers do not have to hire a lawyer to file a complaint with the State Board about their homes or the setup of the homes.

The law said issues must go to the State Board before they can go to civil litigation. The state Supreme Court unanimously upheld the law in 2014.

However, the question has arisen about whether complaints are investigated by the State Board staff if a consumer hires a lawyer. Two board members sought assurances that the state law was being followed by the staff of the Division of Labor, which also staffs the State Board.

Mitch Woodrum, chairman of the State Board and commissioner of the Division of Labor, told the panel that complaints are investigated, and all matters are taken to the board, unless the consumer refuses. In those cases, a letter is sent to the consumer that he or she has refused to follow state law and that the staff could proceed no further.

Board members expressed their agreement with the policy.

The State Board has been chronically short of inspectors. At Wednesday's meeting, two new inspectors were introduced. They are from Dunbar and Elizabeth.

Board member George Gunnell sought assurances that all inspectors would be properly trained to inspect homes for recognized defects, but not simple cosmetic problems that do not arise to the level of a defect. Furthermore, Gunnell sought assurances that inspectors would not recommend to consumers to seek private legal help against manufacturers or retailers of homes being inspected. Woodrum gave the board those assurances.

On other matters, the State Board:

-- Heard from Woodrum that federal regulators have looked over the state regulatory program and have given it their approval for another year.

--Fined River Valley Contracting \$200 for working on a home without a proper state license.

--Fined two other companies a combined \$1,500 for separate violations.

--Learned that 28 companies had failed to file proper documentation for work done during the year. Violations are subject to being fine up to \$75 each.

--Approved a contractor license for Greg Mitchell, doing business as Larry Mitchell Mobile Home Moving of Washington, Wood County.

--Submitted to an industry-funded repair fund a complaint filed by Lisa Boling of Salt Rock for problems with her home.

--Scheduled its next meeting for 10 a.m. March 29.