



Pros offer free oil spill claims advice more than a year later

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The Walton Area Chamber of Commerce joined forces with accountants and law firms to offer one-on-one sessions for business owners and individuals navigating the BP claims process.

Carr, Riggs and Ingram; McDaniel and Associates; Saltmarsh, Cleaveland & Gund; Pleat and Perry; and a representative from Texas' Buzbee law firm in Houston were present at the June 1 session.

From 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., residents could receive free advice on how to deal with BP claims adjustors, the ins and outs of filing a claim, and why it might be best to seek professional assistance in registering a claim.

Glenn Scharf, CPA and shareholder at Saltmarsh, said that as a firm, they have handled hundreds of BP claims. It's been his experience that BP claims are tricky considering the Gulf Coast Claims Facility (GCCF), the group that accepts and resolves claims of individuals and businesses for costs and damages from the 2010 oil spill, are constantly redefining who and what qualifies to get money.

"It is my advice that if you feel as if you have a claim, then you need to make sure you come to BP with a number," he said.

Scharf added that since it's been over a year since the oil spill, there is more data now. The data can be helpful or detrimental toward your claim, but either way it's more important than ever to give accurate calculations to the GCCF.

Matt Turpin, manager with Carr, Riggs & Ingram, said that the benefit of having professional help with your claim is their experience, and persistence with pressing the GCCF.

"Once submitted we are in constant contact with the GCCF and other GCCF representatives checking the status of the claim," he said. "We have prepared thousands of claims for all types of industries, businesses, individuals and rental properties."

Ryan O. Garrity, attorney at Pleat & Perry, P.A., also said professional help can assist with the headache of understanding how to make a solid claim.

"Many citizens are underestimating the real value of their claim. They do not consider the fact that a future hurricane could push oil on to our beaches, people all over the globe will continue not to come to our beaches for many years to come, and who knows what effect the oil dispersants will have in the future?" he said. "A citizen's release of these future claims is far more valuable than what you lost in 2010 times two."

And just because you have been turned down before, does not mean that you cannot file a successful claim. Scharf said that many claims are turned down because they lack causation, or the ability to prove that their job was affected by the oil spill.

For more information about the event, contact Susan at susan@waltonareachamber.com.

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