

## Foreclosure hotline overwhelmed with calls

**National hotline to help borrowers receives record call-volume on Monday with 5,800 callers, compared to an average of 1,500 a day.**

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NEW YORK (CNN) -- After President Bush's announcement of a plan to ease the foreclosure crisis Thursday, a national hotline to help borrowers facing foreclosure has been inundated with calls, an official of the group that operates the counseling hotline said Friday.

Borrowers facing foreclosure were told to call 888-995-HOPE, a line that has a normal call volume of about 1,500 calls a day, said Tracy Morgan, vice president of communications and business development for the Homeownership Preservation Foundation.

Figures are not yet compiled for Thursday's call volume, but Morgan estimated that it was three to five times the call-volume record set Monday, when 5,800 people called in after media outlets reported the likelihood of the president's announcement.

The Homeownership Preservation Foundation contracts with six credit counseling agencies nationwide to answer calls to the hotline.

One of those agencies, Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Greater Atlanta, received 920 calls between 1 and 5 p.m. Thursday, according to its director of public relations, Scott Scredon.

That's more than 11 times the average call volume of 75 to 80 calls, he said. "We're having to pull some people off of other jobs to take the calls, and some people are working overtime," he noted, but "typically, we've been able to handle the volume."

Scredon said callers are waiting longer on hold to talk with counselors, but all calls are being handled. He had no estimate of the average wait time.

Novadebt, a New Jersey counseling organization that also handles hotline calls, received more than 1,600 calls Thursday, according to Diane Gray, director of counseling and education.

According to Morgan, calls to the hotline have steadily increased throughout the year as the foreclosure crisis has grown and the hotline has gotten more publicity. Calls increased 100 percent from the first quarter of the year to the second quarter, and 94 percent from the second to the third, she said.

The Homeownership Preservation Foundation has increased the number of counselors available to staff the hotline, and it plans to add another 70 by the end of the year to bring the total to 250, she said.

The not-for-profit foundation is funded through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, partnerships with mortgage lenders and servicers, and charitable contributions. ■

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