

Richmond Home Repossessions Double from Year Ago

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Lenders have stepped up repossessions of houses in the Richmond metropolitan area, taking ownership of 334 houses in March, up from 154 in the same month a year ago, according to a report being released this morning by RealtyTrac, an online researcher of foreclosures.

"That tells me that lenders are starting to push through and complete the foreclosure process on properties that were probably held up to see if they would qualify for a loan modification or other foreclosure-prevention program," said Daren Blomquist, spokesman for RealtyTrac.

"We saw this on a national level" as a wave of foreclosures followed a two-month lull, he said.

Statewide, foreclosures rose 2.9 percent in March from a year ago but jumped 34.5 percent from February, RealtyTrac reported.

Virginia was ranked as having the 20th-highest foreclosure rate in the United States, with one in every 558 households receiving a notices of default, trustee sale or auction during March.

The state fared better than the nation as a whole. One in every 352 U.S. households received a foreclosure notice last month. U.S. foreclosure activity rose 7.6 percent in March from a year ago and nearly 19 percent from February.

"Virginia did get up in the top 15 states in the nation in 2008 and 2009 but then started to flat line with no big increases since then," Blomquist said.

Most of the sharp increases here and nationally last month came from lender repossessions, he said.

"We expect that roller-coaster pattern will continue through the year," Blomquist said. "The bottom line is there is a lot of distressed inventory out there, and we think the pipeline will remain full this year."

Mike Burnette with Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia said the Richmond-based housing advocacy group is seeing fewer people trying to stop foreclosures but a rise in the number who are having trouble paying their mortgages because they lost their jobs or their incomes fell.

RealtyTrac also released first-quarter results, which showed foreclosure activity up 16 percent nationwide from January through March a year ago and one in every 138 U.S. households receiving a notice of default or auction sale.

Again, Virginia did better, with foreclosure activity falling 1.3 percent in the first three months of the year from the same period a year ago, and fewer households -- or one in every 227 -- having trouble making mortgage payments.