

# Officials assess damage at harbor

18 boats sunk, four lost at sea, half of U Dock destroyed

Harbor



BILL LOVEJOY/SENTINEL

The mast of a submerged sailboat protrudes from the water at the harbor Saturday.

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3-12-11

SANTA CRUZ — The Santa Cruz Small Craft Harbor will be closed for at least a few days while crews assess the structural and environmental damage caused Friday by the tsunami surges from the 8.9-magnitude earthquake in Japan, officials said Saturday.

Officials have counted 18 sunken vessels and many more that continue to take on water and are in danger of sinking, according to Coast Guard Lt. Renee McKinnon.

Andrew Hughan, with the state Department of Fish and Game, said the harbor's top concern is oil and fuel leaking from the boats. While officials have yet to find any affected animals, the impact on marine life remains unknown. One small oil sheen was found in the north end of the harbor by Coast Guard helicopters early Saturday morning, though McKinnon said she believes there will be more.

There were a few surges Saturday, but they were less intense than Friday's. But while the big waves

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# HARBOR

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may have ceased, Port Director Lisa Ekers said she believes "the environmental disaster is still going on."

The overall damage to the harbor is still being calculated, though the preliminary damage estimate is \$17.5 million.

Ekers said half of U Dock was destroyed and at least 10 other docks sustained significant damage.

Most of Saturday was spent assessing damage with the help of structural engineers and divers. Although a couple of boats had been removed from the harbor by cranes, the rest would remain until environmental officials determine if they're leaking fuel and other water contaminants.

"Our crews are busy at work," Ekers said. "The harbor has a significant amount of damage. Our hearts go out to all those who have damaged property and have lost homes."

## HELPING 'LIVE-BOARDS'

With fuel spilled throughout the harbor, multiple unusable docks and several uninhabitable boats, Ekers said her top priorities are to help the 60 registered "live-boards," people who have made the harbor their home, and raising boats that may still be salvageable.

"We're grateful for those who can wait," Ekers said. "It will take some time to determine how much damage there is and we don't know how long it will be until the harbor is fully operational again."

For Sean Collins, owner of a sailboat, Zoey, and one of the harbor's many "live-boards," the surges threatened his home on the water.

"The funny thing about Santa Cruz, is that someone says there is a tsunami and everyone goes to the beach," Collins said. The tsunami warning woke Collins on Friday. "The only reason I came back down here is because (this boat) is my home."

Collins spent most of Friday trying to keep his ship tethered to the dock. "She broke off twice," he said, adding that without the help of fellow boat owners, he wouldn't have been able to keep the ship anchored.

"It was insane — we ran down there when she did a full 360 (degree rotation) and we were so afraid that the floating docks would hit her."

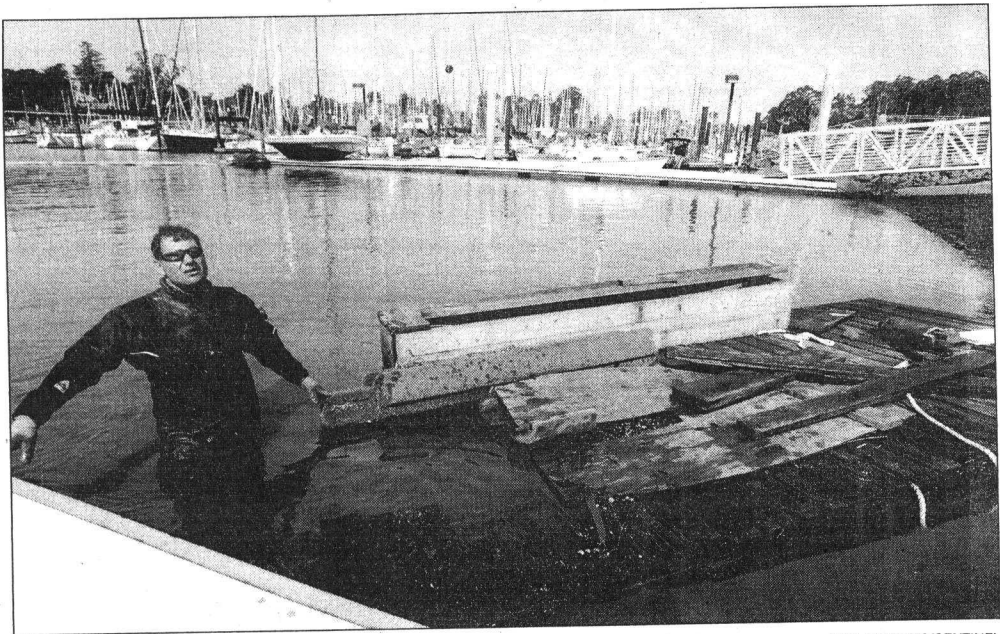
## ASSESSING THE TOLL

Though Collins' boat managed to stay afloat, others were not as lucky.

Besides the 18 vessels that sank, four others were washed out to sea.

McKinnon said no boats would likely be lifted from the harbor Saturday. She described the removal process as placing air bags under the boats to lift them, or using cranes, depending on the size and weight of the boats.

McKinnon said her team focused Saturday on fuel spills.



BILL LOVEJOY/SENTINEL

Diver Mike Butler guides debris toward the launch ramp at the Santa Cruz harbor Saturday as cleanup efforts begin.

To contain the spreading, officials place oil booms around vessels believed to be leaking.

Keeping anxious boat owners off the docks while damage and environmental assessments are done has not been an easy feat.

Scott Sommers, the self-proclaimed "Mayor of U Dock," couldn't wait to get to the harbor to assess the damage to his boat, which was surrounded by debris Saturday.

"We're a little antsy to find out if everything's OK," Sommers said. "The harbor (patrol) went down there and said (my boat's) still floating, so that's good."

While Sommers does not live on his boat, he cares for it like a house. He said the loss of U Dock is devastating.

"We double-tied all the boats with every piece of rope we could find," Sommers said. "But the dock failed, and when it sank, it took all the boats with it."

## COUNTY, STATE RELIEF

Paul Horvat, manager for the county's emergency services, assured boat owners that his department is doing everything in its power to assist in the damage assessment process so the owners can present an accurate count to the government for possible reimbursement.

"We're going to try to get as much disaster recovery for our residents as possible," said Horvat, who is working to get state money after Gov. Jerry Brown declared a state of emergency for Santa Cruz County.

"It's pretty devastating," Harbor Commissioner Dennis Smith said. "Until we get divers down to assess, we have no idea how much damage is underwater — it's going to be a slow process to recovery."

To aid boat owners like Sommers, Betty T. Yee, a member of the state Board of Equalization, announced Friday that emergency relief tax extensions for filing, audits, billing notices, assessments and relief from subsequent penalties are available for individuals or businesses affected by the tsunami surge along the coast in Santa Cruz County. Any taxpayer or fee payer who, as a result of the water



BILL LOVEJOY/SENTINEL

California Department of Fish and Game officers begin to clear the harbor of debris Saturday morning.

surge, cannot meet tax filing and payment deadlines may apply at [www.boe.ca.gov](http://www.boe.ca.gov).

While he said he understands the urge to visit the harbor to investigate damaged property, Santa Cruz Deputy Police Chief Steve Clark asked that the public continue to cooperate and support recovery efforts by staying away from the water and off the docks, many of which have not been proven safe.

"A tsunami watch does not mean watch the tsunami," he said, adding that his officers' duties during the surge included crowd control on and around the Murray Street Bridge, where hundreds gathered to watch.

"Nature's going to do what nature's going to do," Clark said. "Our main concern is providing security for those whose investments and lives are out there in the harbor."

Though the dredge was dislodged from the dock during the surges, Smith said no damage to the dredge was reported.

"It's anchored with 3,000 pounds and it still managed to break away and turn sideways," said Smith. "But the initial inspection proved that it's not leaking oil or taking on water."

## WORK CONTINUES

Efforts to secure boats to the docks that remained intact continued Saturday, with boat owners reflecting back on how the community came together under pressure Friday.

For Walter Wall and his wife Maureen, that meant working with fellow boaters to tie down the Mary Alice so it would not suffer the same fate as the ves-

sel next to it, which capsized Friday.

"When mine broke loose, I thought, 'Well, there goes my boat,'" Walter Wall said. "But, she's hanging in there."

Walter Wall, who typically uses his boat for fishing and whale watching, said Friday's surges were like nothing he'd ever seen in the harbor.

"It came in here like wildfire at 30 miles an hour and the boats went flying," said Walter Wall, who spent all of Friday helping others tie their boats down before debris broke them loose.

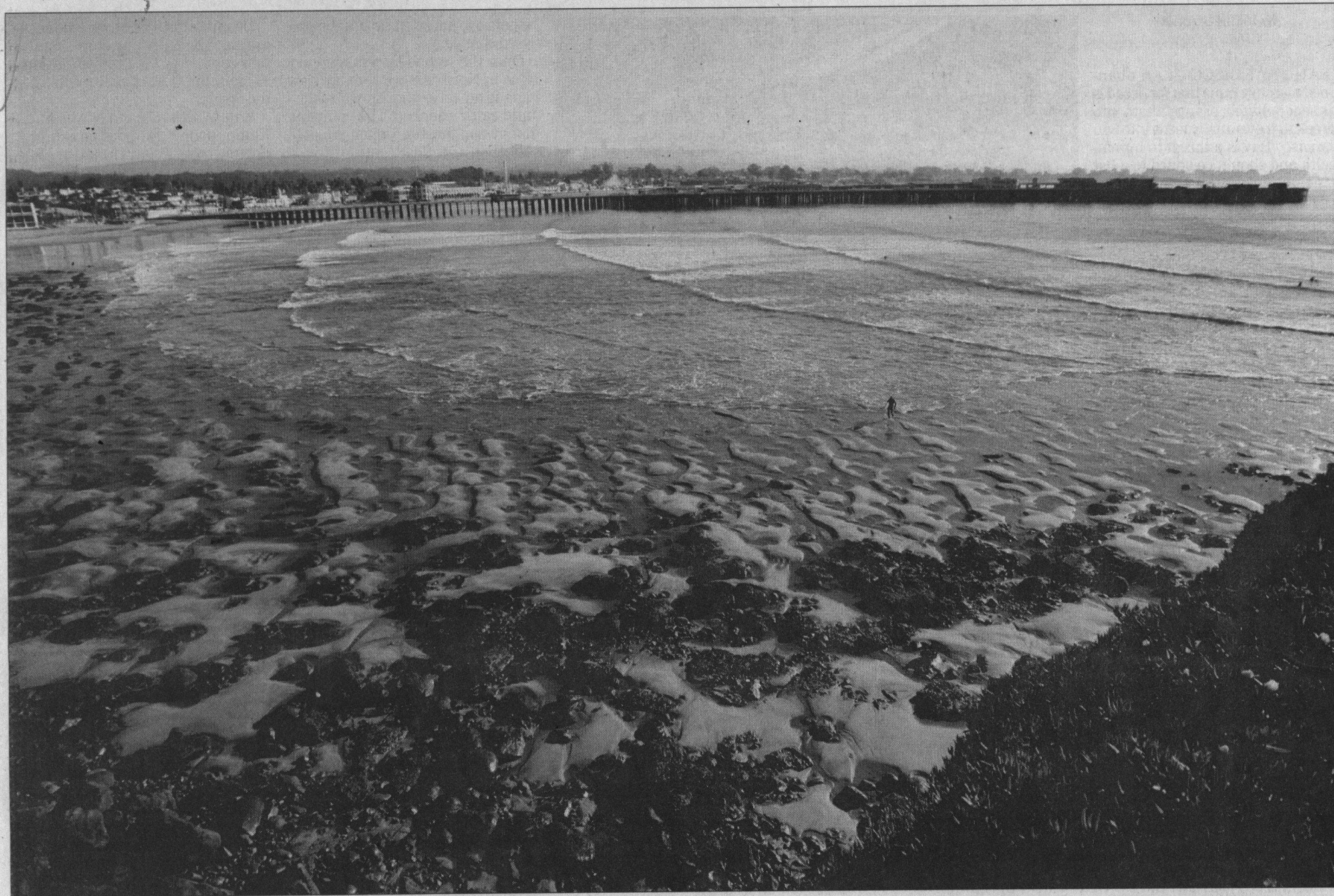
A friend of Walter Wall's, who had his boat moved by harbor officials from I Dock to J Dock for dock refurbishment one day before the tsunami, also watched his boat capsize. "It's ironic, because if his boat hadn't been moved, it probably would have been just fine," he said.

While Walter Wall was quick to lend a hand Friday, Maureen Wall said that both she and her husband were anxious.

"It was a mess," said Maureen Wall, who was grateful that police were understanding of boaters' concerns. "But it's nice to know that in an emergency, so many people were there to help."

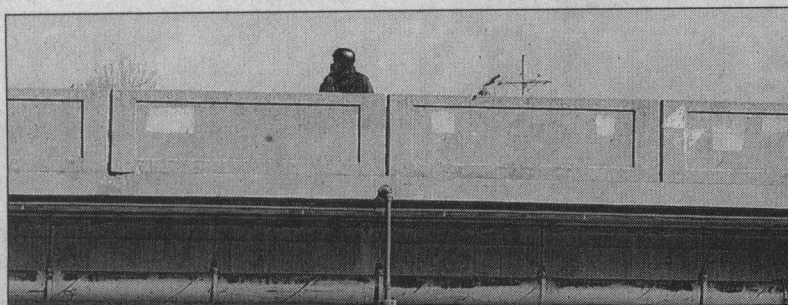
For reports of harbor pollution, the Coast Guard asked that the public call 800-424-8802. Ekers recommended that boat owners who are aware of damage contact their insurance company and get a marine surveyor to provide an assessment. Boat owners from Docks U, G and J, are encouraged to contact the harbor office at 475-6161 with reports of damage.

# Tsunami effects felt in Santa Cruz



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

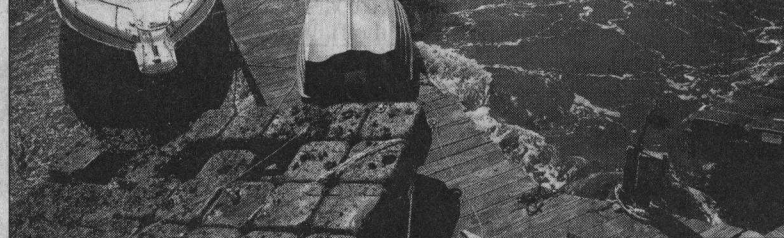
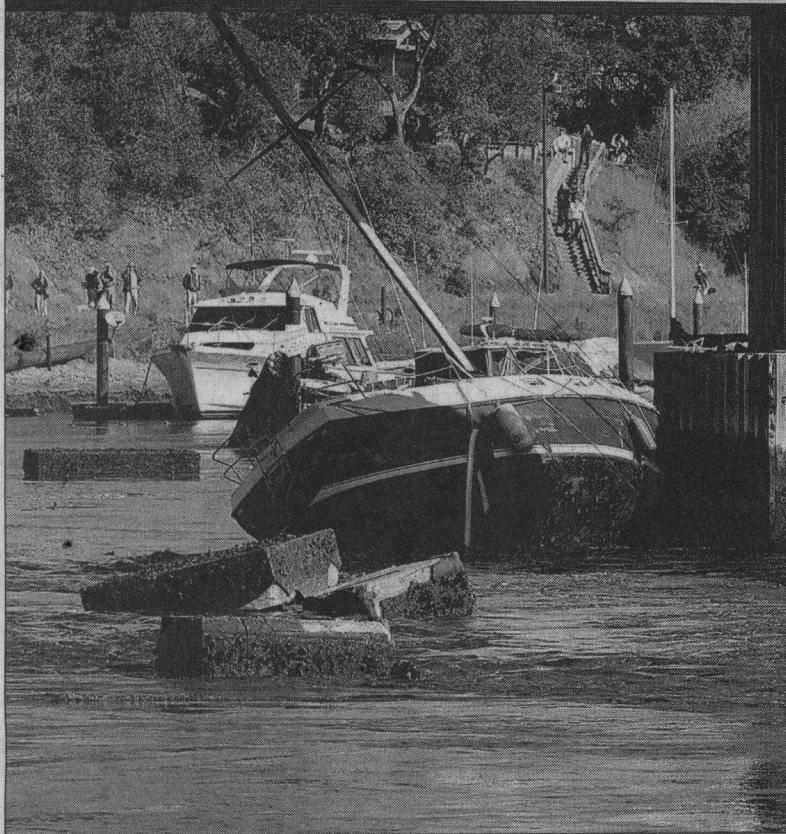
Jimmy Shanks of Santa Cruz, right of center, leaves Cowell's surf break as the tsunami surge drains the water from the cove, leaving Shanks high and dry on the exposed bay bottom. 'It was like a moonscape out there,' quipped Shanks. 'It completely wiped out the waves as it surged in for the last 20 minutes.' Many longtime locals said they had never seen Cowell's drained like it did Friday morning.



Friday's tsunami surges decimated Leo Morelli and Tim Obert's sportfishing

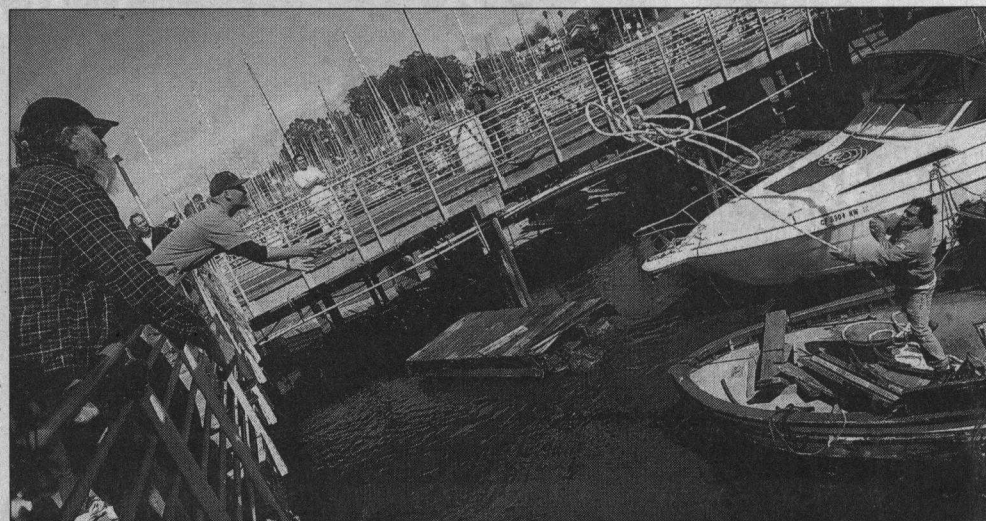
A sailboat is pinned beneath the Murray Street bridge, which spans Santa Cruz harbor. The boat was held there Friday morning by its mast, which is pinned against the road above while the tsunami surge sucks water out of the harbor. Broken dock floats stream past in the surge.

DAN COYRO/SENTINEL



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doos as the  
dock gradually  
splintered and  
gave way under  
the onslaught.

LARISSA MUELLER/  
SENTINEL



LARISSA MUELLER/SENTINEL

Leo Morelli throws a rope from his vintage 1943 wooden boat to a helper on a harbor pier. The dock near Morelli's boat gradually splintered and gave way under Friday's repeated tsunami surges. 'I own this dock,' said Morelli, 'All this is me. If it goes, I'm going with it.'



KEVIN JOHNSON/SENTINEL

ABOVE: Seaweed and garbage washed ashore near Capitola Village on Friday after the tsunami surge hit.



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

ABOVE RIGHT: Tsunami watchers line the cliff above Cowell's on Friday morning, waiting for a glimpse of the sea surge generated by a massive earthquake in Japan.

## ON THE NET

To view more photos and video of the tsunami, visit  
[WWW.SANTACRUZSENTINEL.COM](http://WWW.SANTACRUZSENTINEL.COM)

KEVIN JOHNSON/SENTINEL

RIGHT: Kids skateboard on closed roads in a quiet Capitola Village on Friday afternoon during the tsunami threat.

