

Floods - 1982

Despite Problems, SC County Remains Safe, Geologist Says

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UCSC geologist Dr. Robert Curry wants to impress everybody that "Santa Cruz is a pretty safe place to be," but his idea of safety may not be that embraced by the rest of us.

He told a small audience Wednesday night that although this county has suffered its worst disaster in recorded history in early January, it basically is a safe place.

Its safety is that except where urbanization has blocked the natural process, the county is built to live with flooding and that it has proved it can/well survive the "biggest (earthquake) event" this area can ever expect.

Curry said the 1906 earthquake along San Andreas Fault — which was as big as could ever be expected — caused relatively little damage across the county, except in Boulder Creek which is close to the major fault.

He said the Zayante, Butano and Gregoria are smaller faults and the magnitude of their shakings would be expected to cause less than major damage.

However, even while insisting the county is safe, Curry said we can expect "the

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ultimate fire" because smaller fires are put out all the time in the timberlands and that floods probably will cause more and more damage as the watershed in the Santa Cruz mountains supports more and more homes.

He said that flooding has been made worse by the urbanization and that roads and storm drains are "the main culprits."

Curry ended his talk by showing slides of the 1906 earthquake on a 1906 projector using 1906 slides (some had never been shown before) using an irreplaceable 1906 light in the projector.

Curry spoke before the Affiliates, a group created to create positive and permanent relationships between Santa Cruz and UCSC.

Of the January storm that killed 22 people and destroyed over 300 homes, Curry said it didn't follow the script the geologists had written as to high hazard slide areas.

"We thought we knew where the

landslides were in Santa Cruz County, but most of the places we ranked as high hazard held.

"Places that caused major damage to houses (because of slides) were not ranked as high hazard," Curry said.

He noted the geologists' landslide identification publication was available prior to the storms, but had not been given wide distribution.

He said the January storm, from a geological point of view, was a 100-year rainfall that created a 25-year flood. His figures are the estimated repetition of such rains and floods.

The 1982 flood was slightly less than the 1955-56 flood that resulted in a high water flow to sea of 30,400 cubic feet per second at its peak compared to 29,700 cfs for this year's flood.

Curry told the small audience at the main library they were lucky to live in Santa Cruz, "an active geology that gives us all the ability to understand the dynamics — it is a living history.

"Just about everything that can happen to us has happened, except a major fire, and in spite of what has happened, we live in a safe place."

He added, "Geologically, however, we are eroding rapidly into the sea."