

# Radin describes the city's response to Oct. 17 quake

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When the earthquake struck at 4:04 p.m. Oct. 17, it was just a matter of minutes before Watsonville's emergency team went into operation, City Manager John Radin said yesterday.

Addressing the weekly meeting of the Watsonville Rotary Club, Radin outlined what was involved in responding to the greatest natural disaster in the city's history. He said that for a bit more than an hour, the emergency headquarters was comprised of two police vehicles while crews tried to restore power to the police building.

At 6:30, that was accomplished, and city employees moved to the police building's second floor.

"A lot of us didn't leave for three or four days," Radin said, and after two weeks, counselors were called in to deal with stressed-out emergency workers.

"We had people that were really close to the breaking point," Radin said.

That wouldn't be surprising considering what the city was up against. Among the problems listed by Radin yesterday:

- About 1,200 people were in need of shelter. There were 196 homes in Watsonville damaged badly enough to be red-tagged as unsafe for occupancy.

- A major water main broke,

cutting off service to many and resulting in the loss of nine million gallons in one day.

- At one point 40 trucks were waiting to unload supplies. A lot of donated clothing hadn't been sized, cleaned or sorted, which caused backups at warehouses.

- Food was coming in and being transferred to a local food bank.

- Some people volunteered to help handling donations, then made off with the goods. This forced an end to using volunteers and slowed some of the distribution.

- Building inspectors from around the state, 32 in all, had to inspect 6,254 homes and more than 1,100 businesses for structural damage.

- And many of the older buildings downtown were seriously damaged and were candidates for demolition.

Radin said the downtown was a no-win situation. He said his philosophy was that owners should be given every chance to rebuild and that nothing should be demolished without the owner's consent.

Even so, "I caught a lot of hell because we didn't do it fast enough, and some people complained we did it too fast," he said.

Many of the city's supervisory employees had attended disaster-relief classes, and that really paid off in terms of the city's response, Radin said. He also feels the federal and state disaster-response systems worked pretty well.

"We were inundated with help," he said."

The focus now will be on rebuilding. Radin said 80 percent of the homes that were red-tagged can be put on new foundations and rehabilitated. He also said it's imperative to make sure that all pre-1950 buildings are brought up to current code standards, though he wryly added that after the quake, "We don't have too many left" that aren't up to code.

In the downtown, developer Barry Swenson's plans to rebuild the 200 block, the heart of the city's downtown redevelopment project, will be brought before a joint meeting of the City Council and Planning Commission Jan. 16. If the plans are approved, construction could begin as early as February, Radin said.

In the 300 and 400 blocks there are owners who want to rebuild, and Radin said the prospects for those blocks are good. But he cautioned, "You're not going to see it done overnight."

—Mike Wallace