

County prepares residents for winter

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Weather

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BEN LOMOND — After two disastrous winters and another wet one predicted, county erosion control experts are already warning mountain residents to be safe rather than sorry.

At the last of a series of seminars held at Wilder Hall here Saturday in accordance with Erosion Control Month, residents were told to leave their homes and seek temporary shelter when in doubt about possible landslides during winter storms.

Susan Williamson, county environmental planning resource supervisor, and county Planning Geologist Dave Leslie made the recommendation to mountain residents who live below unstable slopes or hills that have been identified as dangerous by experts.

Neither, however, would predict when residents should leave their homes. They pointed to a number of factors that include specific site location, slope steepness

vegetation cover and the amount and intensity of rain.

"It's a matter of perception of risk," Williamson told The Sentinel later. "Everyone has to evaluate their own situation and decide for themselves when to leave."

Leslie told the audience of around 15 persons that "life is always more important than a dwelling.

"There does come a point where leaving your house is better than staying there," he added.

Even those persons who live below slopes that have not slid during the past two wet winters are not totally safe, said Leslie. "Not all slopes fail at the same time. As long as we have heavy rainfalls, we will continue to see slope failures."

Last year's rainfall totalled some 100 inches in Ben Lomond and 120 inches in Boulder Creek.

Local consulting geologist Gerald Weber, who was not in attendance, has developed a formula where he tries to

predict when landslides will occur. His formula states that when certain mountain areas receive 25 to 30 inches of rain, the potential for landslides increases and residents "might start thinking about moving."

His formula goes on to say that once the ground is already saturated and has not had a chance to dry out, that $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch of rain an hour without any sign of letup could be cause for concern.

Williamson called Weber's formula "thought provoking," but said predicting when landslides will occur is "very difficult."

Leslie conceded that watching the antecedent rainfall — how much rain has fallen — is a critical factor. He recommended area residents buy rain gauges to keep track for themselves. He also said the best action persons could take would be to "reduce the potential of a problem by preventive erosion control measures."

Such measures range from planting

soil-holding groundcovers or trees to putting down jute netting or plastic for protection of bare slopes. Local nurseries are holding sales this month to encourage homeowners to protect their property.

Leslie said that trees do a lot for erosion control. They should be left standing unless they are leaning or growing directly over the house.

Another important area that shouldn't be overlooked is water runoff from roofs or other impervious soils.

"An enormous amount of water collects on roofs," said Leslie. "Homes should be equipped with gutters and downspouts, and that water should be carried to safe areas for drainage."

Perforated drainage pipe is available in various length rolls to carry that runoff.

Leslie recommended persons look around their property to spot possible dangers. Annual maintenance is necessary to prevent problems down the road.