

Most vicious' storm slams county ✓

Power outages hit 40,000 residences

By RICK CHATENEVER
Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — Winds gusting up to 80 knots hit the coastline and more than two inches of rain fell in some parts of the mountains Saturday as this winter's "most vicious" storm slammed into the county.

Some 16,000 city and county residents from La Selva Beach to the San Lorenzo Valley and North Coast were still without power late Saturday afternoon. A PG&E spokesman didn't expect full resumption of service before some time today.

Up to 40,000 homes in the county were without power at some point during the Saturday storm, estimated PG&E spokesman Loren Ingols. He said damage from tree branches falling into powerlines was "widespread, from the ocean to the mountains."

Although PG&E crews and fire departments throughout the county were kept busy answering calls of fallen tree limbs and power lines down, there were no reports of more serious damage.

The power outage combined with an extremely high tide and winds of 60-70 knots gusting up to 80 knots caused the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf to be closed for about three hours Saturday, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. The high winds blew aggregate off the roofs of several buildings on the wharf, but no more serious damage was reported.

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Large areas of Felton, Ben Lomond, Boulder Creek, Lompico and Zayante were still without power Saturday night. Travel on Lompico Road, already reduced to one lane, was further aggravated by the loss of power to a traffic light at a key intersection.

No part of the county was spared, and power outages were also reported from the Watsonville area.

The high winds were caused by the storm's intense low pressure center, reported Santa Cruz meteorologist Ron MacDonald. The front passed through Santa Cruz between 6 and 6:30 a.m., accompanied by what he called "incredibly strong winds, relentless winds."

Initially the winds came from the south, before shifting to drive the front in a southerly direction.

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Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

A large eucalyptus tree closed East Cliff Drive at 8th Avenue Saturday.

Power outages

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Reported Saturday rainfall totals varied from .63-inch in Aptos to 2.85-inches in Boulder Creek. Rainfall throughout the county was some 2-inches more than this time a year ago, with Santa Cruz' 12.84-inches doubling its seasonal norm of 6.01-inches.

Although Santa Cruz County had received heavier rainfall for a 24-hour period in November, the addition of the strong winds prompted MacDonald to say the system was the winter's "most severe — its most vicious storm."

But county residents who had come through the past two winters here took Saturday's weather in stride. Despite the loss of power to much of the 41st Avenue merchandising row including Capitola Mall, a few stores stayed open as long as daylight permitted.

The rain kept many early Christmas shoppers home but both Sears and Mervyn's continued doing business, with Mervyn's store director

Steve Shiraki reporting some customers "bringing their own flashlights."

Nearby Orchard Supply and Hardware also stayed open with power supplied by a generator. Some store clerks reportedly passed out flashlights to shoppers as they entered the store.

And some youngsters in the East Cliff Drive area tried to make the most out of gusty winds. There were reports of skateboarders in that vicinity using sheets as sails.

	24 Hrs.	Season	Last Year
Aptos	.63	9.999.24	
Ben Lomond	2.48	24.84	19.73
Bonny Doon	1.97	23.55	19.96
Boulder Creek	2.85	25.49	22.14
Capitola	1.05	12.32	11.0
Felton	1.72	19.17	18.48
Graham Hill Rd	1.35	17.40	15.60
Lompico	2.75	23.20	21.50
Santa Cruz	.87	12.84	10.65
Soquel	1.14	12.16	11.43
Swanton	.76	13.26	12.35

Sentinel staff writer Jamie Marks also contributed to this report.