

County officials hope the final bar has sounded on 'leaky roof blues'

By JAMIE MARKS

Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — They're singing the Hallelujah Chorus at the County Government Center these days as workers descend on the leaky roof.

Two winters of ravaging storms have taken their toll on the flat surface, making it more a sieve than a ceiling in wet weather.

The situation reached crisis proportions earlier this year when the government ran out of buckets to contain all the leaks. Just kidding.

The sight of repairmen on the courthouse roof has brought a song to many a heart. And an earache to many an ear.

With the workers came assorted power tools. And with the power tools came a song more like thunder than music.

The deafening roar of drills, hammers and sledge-hammers from above is especially loud in courtrooms, where the moldy, wet carpeting has been removed.

Monday morning, for instance, Superior Court Judge Rollie Hall discovered just how loud it could get. In attempting to carry out a brief criminal calendar, he was stopped on several occasions by the court reporter asking him to repeat what he had

said. She sits just eight feet away from the judge.

Municipal Court Judge Bill Kelsay said he can hear the workers, "But I'm willing to tolerate almost anything at this point."

Kelsay said the workers haven't begun repairing the roof above his courtroom. For now, anyway, he's been spared the reverberating sound of power tools from above.

Good thing, too. All the shake, rattle and roll might bring down another tile like the one that crashed onto his seat one wet Monday morning earlier this month.

Lucky for him, the tiles fell a couple of minutes before he was sitting at the bench.

"I'm going to be most patient with them. I like a dry courtroom," Kelsay said of the repairmen.

Nonetheless, he added, "I don't have a lot of hope for success. I'm just a bit skeptical of the timing (of the repair work)."

The repairmen are first attacking the courthouse roof, said analyst Sue Robinette of the County Administrative Office, because "That was the worst part (of the problem)."

The courthouse is filled with beautiful skylights that contain hundreds of square inches for rain to leak through.

But even in areas where there aren't any skylights, county workers have discovered drips. Like on the fifth floor of the main government center building, where analyst Mike Vanderveer was forced to evacuate his office for a week.

That roof is next on the agenda of repairs, said Robinette, with the atrium connecting the two wings of the building slated to follow.

Western Roofing Contractors of San Francisco has been hired to do the work at a cost of \$433,045.

The good news is that they expect to complete the courthouse portion in the next three weeks, said Robinette.

The bad news is that they are already way behind schedule.

Robinette said the company had promised to finish the project by Dec. 2.

"We have a penalty clause written into the contract," said Robinette. Thus, the county may be able to bargain the price of the repair work down a bit.

Much of the money — \$252,281, according to Robinette — is coming from the state, with the county kicking in \$178,000 of the repair cost.

But these figures don't include the cost of replacing thousands of square feet of decayed carpeting and warped wooden furniture.