

Earthquake 1989-
Geological

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Danger of massive slides

By JAMIE S. CACKLER
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — When the rainy season comes, whole mountainside neighborhoods could be in danger from massive, ancient landslides possibly reactivated by last week's 7.1 magnitude earthquake, a geologist told the county Board of Supervisors Tuesday.

Hundreds of ground fissures and cracks form patterns around mountainsides known to scientists as ancient landslide areas, said Gary Griggs, UC Santa Cruz professor of earth sciences.

Heavy rains will pour into those cracks, and could reactivate the large-scale slides on mountainsides now dotted with homes, Griggs said. That prospect, he said, is "frightening to geologists."

If the cracks mark "the beginning of reactivation of large landslide masses, there could be literally hundreds of homes at stake," he said.

However, Griggs said, if and when the large-scale landslides begin to move, their movement will probably be slow, slipping along like ancient glaciers.

"Large landslide masses move

very slowly. We're probably not looking at another Love Creek... not an instantaneous movement and loss of life," he said, referring to the devastating Ben Lomond mudslides that killed 10 people during the great storm of 1982.

Meanwhile, Griggs said, the good news is that the local segment of the San Andreas fault has probably spent itself for the next century and a half.

Along the Santa Cruz Mountains segment of the fault, "I would be very surprised" if the area suffered any earthquake as high as 7 magnitude within the next 150 years, he

said.

Worst hit are hillside neighborhoods in the Summit area and Glenwood Drive area.

"I would not buy a home in the Villa del Monte area today," Griggs told reporters after his presentation to the supervisors.

That area, near Summit Road in Soquel Supervisor Jan Beautz's district, has a clear pattern of deep cracks around an ancient landslide area, Griggs said. He illustrated his presentation with aerial and ground photo slides, clearly show-

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Geologist Gary Griggs
Has warning for mountain areas

Slides/ Hundreds of homes are at stake

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ing the long lines, some crescent-shaped, around the endangered areas.

"I think there's cause for alarm, but not instant alarm," Griggs said. So far, there has been only a little rain, he said, and scientists will know more about the danger when heavier rains come.

There is a small chance that the cracks could be part of a temporary

resettling of the ground, and that the areas could heal over. But, Griggs said, "I would be surprised if they somehow magically closed up and healed over."

Building policies and standards must be questioned, he said.

In some hard-hit areas, even new buildings which had passed strict earthquake standards fell down. Around the Morrell Cutoff in the Summit area, some modern homes

were thrown right off their attached foundations, he said.

Geologists were surprised to find homes severely damaged on the ridge tops, which were solid bedrock and should have stood firm against the shaking.

But, Griggs said, "ridge tops literally exploded" as energy from the grinding plates burst through the surface. Houses there were severely damaged, but face no fu-

ture damage from slides, at least.

On the other hand, some homes on hillsides appear in good condition now, but could face destruction as the earth below them fails.

County Planning Department officials told the supervisors that homes and neighborhoods will have to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the geology as well as the current condition of the buildings.