

Cracks in 13 Santa Cruz County dams

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Thirteen of 21 small earth-fill dams in Santa Cruz County sustained minor cracks in the Oct. 17 earthquake, according to a federal survey released last week.

Altogether, the U.S. Department

EARTHQUAKE '89 - Santa Cruz County
of Agriculture's Soil Conservation Service reported on 93 small earth-fill dams in Santa Cruz and eight nearby counties affected by the quake and found that 73 percent had no observable damage.

Of those that were damaged, only 40 percent required repair.

The remaining 60 percent had "minor cracks in no immediate need of repair," the survey said.

The highest percentage of damage was in Santa Cruz County, but none of the damage was identified as an immediate threat.

The dams had either longitudinal cracks running along the length of the dam or transverse cracks running across the width of the dam," the survey said. "The cracks were caused by either shaking of the embankment or settling of the foundation soils during the earthquake."

Soil Conservation Service geologist Lyle Steffen said many of those cracks extend only two to five feet deep causing no immediate threat. But if not repaired, Steffen said, the cracks could grow into gullies, which could erode with runoff of surface waters and lead to the future failure of those dams.