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Aromas gets worst of quakes

3 houses red-tagged after tremors

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Yesterday morning's swarm of earthquakes did the worst of their damage in the Aromas area, where at least three homes were rendered uninhabitable.

As of this morning, Aromas Tri-County Fire District Chief Ken French had found three homes, including a mobile home, that had to be red-tagged, or condemned for occupancy, in southern Aromas.

The community, which lies in three counties, sustained its most serious damage within a half-mile of the Chittenden Pass-River Oaks area of San Benito County. The epicenter of yesterday's quakes was just outside Aromas.

In Watsonville this morning, there was no word on the fate of the Porter Building, which had been severely damaged in the Oct. 17 earthquake and further damaged by yesterday's series of aftershocks.

Yesterday, city officials had roped off the area around the downtown building - Maple Street between Main and Union streets - as a precaution. Structural engineers had inspected the building yesterday, but their findings were not available this morning.

Monterey County engineers have determined that the Pajaro River bridge did not move during the tremors yesterday and have decided to keep the bridge open, City Clerk Lorraine Washington said this morning.

Most of the county residents who lost power yesterday were back up by noon, and full power was restored to the county by the end of the day, a PG&E spokesman said this morning.

Fire departments throughout the county reported no new earthquake-related problems. The landslide near Chittenden Pass on Highway 129 has been cleared and the road is completely open this morning, a CALTRANS worker said.

In Aromas, fire officials spent all day yesterday conducting a search of the Chittenden Pass neighborhood in hopes of netting enough aftershock-ravaged structures to qualify the area for Federal Emergency Management Agency



Mike McCollum

Lynn and Roger Dodd's Aromas home was red-tagged.

assistance. French, who has been in touch with the state Office of Emergency Services, said 20 homes must be identified before Aromas can qualify for aid under FEMA guidelines.

"I don't think we're going to reach that (figure)," he said.

French said they are trying to identify as many damaged structures as possible before the FEMA deadline for those applying for relief from the Oct. 17 earthquake, which is Saturday.

"We're trying to shirrtail on the previous disasters," he said.

Perhaps the most visible impacts of yesterday's aftershocks can be seen at the Payne Road home of Lynn and Roger Dodd. They reportedly had moved to the house from Watsonville less than a week ago.

The front steps shifted, porch beams moved, rain gutters split and the house is visibly off its foundation.

A yellow mobile home on an adjacent lot also leans on a shifted foundation and is fronted by slanted porch railings.

Longtime Aromas residents knew just what was going on when the series of aftershocks began.

"We sit on the San Andreas fault, so we knew right away," said Darlene Marshall, who lives in Aromas and was at the Ducky Deli this morning.



Mike McCollum

Joe Vyeda surveys the mess yesterday in his orchid greenhouse on Lakeview Drive outside Watsonville.