

Work crews begin repair job on levees

Construction crews began work today on repairs to the Pajaro River levee.

The levees were shattered by the force of the 7.1 earthquake that hit Santa Cruz County on Oct. 17.

Engineers say that 4,700 linear feet of the levee is damaged on both sides of the Pajaro River. Without repairs, heavy winter rains could cause the levee to fail and spill flood waters into the city of Watsonville or nearby agricultural lands.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will oversee the repair work. Granite Construction Co. was awarded the \$1.07 million contract last week.

The 43 damage sites stretch from the Riverside Avenue bridge in Watsonville through agricultural land alongside San Andreas Road to the mouth of the Pajaro River. There are also three damaged areas along Corralitos Creek.

"We must work quickly to re-

pair that damage," said John Azevedo, resident engineer for the Army engineers in Santa Cruz County. "Levee cracks are very susceptible to erosion from rain and river seepage. A weak levee could fail during high water and cause flooding this winter."

To complete repairs before the rainy season, crews may have to work day and night. The work involves digging down through the damaged sections of the levee two to 12 feet. Compacted earth is then placed in the damaged areas, bringing the levee up to its original height.

The 24-mile levee system was built by the Army engineers in 1949.

Water draining off a 1,700-square-mile watershed feeds the Pajaro River. The system was designed to handle the runoff from a storm expected every 100 years. Right now, the channel can handle only one-fifth the volume.

— Bob Smith

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Fixing the levee

Santa Cruz County supervisors Robley Levy, left, and Sherry Mehl peer into cracks in the ground near the recently demolished Thurwachter Bridge, west of Watsonville. The cracks are near the Pajaro River levee,

where 46 cracks are under repair by the Army Corps of Engineers and Granite Construction Co. The levee repair should be complete Nov. 28. This crack is not scheduled for repair because it doesn't directly affect the levee.

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