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# County Effort Is Questioned

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Could the county have saved the town of Soquel from flooding Jan. 4 and spared it the millions of dollars in damages that occurred?

Acting County Administrator George Newell doesn't believe it was possible, given the amount and types of equipment in the county had on hand. (More disaster stories on Pages 2, 13 and 22.)

Newell, who is the county's emergency services officer, is well aware that a number of people in Soquel don't agree with him and that the county is being blamed by some people for not having delivered a large crane the afternoon of Jan. 4 to clear the logjam at Soquel Bridge that caused the downtown flood.

Others have declared that as a last resort, the county should have dynamited the bridge to save the town.

According to Newell and Central County Assistant Fire Chief Steve Negro the following sequence of events took place:

As the creek grew in turbulence and power Monday morning and early afternoon, a number of large logs pounded against the underside of the bridge.

Four large logs caught against the bridge and Negro quickly called the county Public Works Department at 3 p.m., telling them that if they wanted to save the bridge and prevent a flood, they'd better get a large crane to remove the logs.

He reported that Public Works told him they would get right on it.

Since the county runs a Public Works Department that contracts out the large jobs and keeps equipment for maintenance, repairs and small jobs, it didn't have a crane large enough for the job, Newell said. It therefore found a private firm that

would send a large crane.

Negro was contacted by the county around 4 p.m. and told that a crane was on the way and would arrive in 45 minutes.

Instead, it broke down and by the time another crane was located — this time in Monterey County — it was 12 hours after Negro's call for help before it arrived.

Newell said this morning in looking back on the disastrous storm, "I don't know how much equipment we would need to handle such a storm. To have that amount of equipment, I know we wouldn't have a general fund budget, but a Public Works Department budget."

He added, "We just didn't have the equipment of our own to save Soquel from flooding, or the type of equipment to do rescue and recovery work at such places as Love Creek."

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## COUNTY EFFORT

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Along with trucks for maintenance work and some backhoes, the county has only a couple of bulldozers it uses at the two dumps.

"The needs created by the storm were unknown at first and were only learned as time went on, and those needs quickly outstripped our resources," Newell said.

Newell and Negro agree that blowing the bridge would have made matters worse.

"When you blow something up, it comes down again," Newell said, pointing out that it would probably have come down just where it sits, or flowed down to the next bridge and caused a greater dam there.

Negro sees it that way and that "also how do you go about blowing up a bridge? Where do you get the material? Where do you get someone to hang over the bridge and set the charge?"

Negro has repeated that many people in Soquel have complained that the county was not highly visible in its efforts to help clean up after the storm.

That complaint is more widely spread than just in the Soquel area and has been heard in the spots where San Lorenzo Valley volunteer firemen have carried the lion's share of the difficult and dangerous work.

Newell is less than apologetic about the county's efforts during the storm, saying that he is aware that most clean-up work was left to the neighborhoods.

There continues to be isolated areas where roads are out and efforts are

continuing to get them open, Newell said.

He said that by the time federal emergency administrators came in last Thursday, they had to be convinced of the terrible damage that had occurred.

"They were amazed when we told that 58 county road were out of commission, that perhaps hundreds of private roads were out and that damage was being estimated at \$106 million, at least," Newell said.

Even with rescue work going on, the county sent in "a digger" to Soquel on Tuesday and this week there were conservation workers helping in Soquel, Newell said.

Negro said that last Friday the emergency services had approved a work order for a private contractor to use his large machines to help clean the town. However, he said the townspeople still felt the county had done too little.

Newell responded, "I really don't feel its appropriate for the county to be doing clean-up work when other people are isolated and must be reached to provide services."

Newell said he is proud of the county's reaction, its setting up the emergency services center, and the around-the-clock work done by county employees.

However, he isn't positive that the town of Soquel couldn't have been saved from disaster.

"Maybe when we go back over everything that happened, analyze what happened, we will see that there could have been a way to prevent the flooding. But I can't see it now," Newell said.