

Landslide threat puts Summit homes in limbo

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SANTA CRUZ — Amid warnings from geologists that giant ancient, reactivated landslide masses are already moving, the county Tuesday put a limit on repairs to many Summit-area homes.

County supervisors decided that earthquake-damaged homes threatened by slides can't be repaired unless geological studies prove the structures are safe from slide danger.

The board's decision Tuesday went against an earlier one which would have allowed repair of homes at the owner's risk. But testimony that some areas have slipped significantly since the Oct. 17 earthquake prompted the decision.

The restrictions will affect hundreds of

Summit-area homes.

At the same time, the supervisor enacted a temporary moratorium on new construction in the hazard zones.

Supervisors Jan Beautz and Fred Keeley, who represent the mountain areas with the highest damage, called the restrictions unfair.

"If there is such as risk, why aren't we evacuating people? I cannot support a recommendation saying people should not be allowed to repair their investment" while neighbors are allowed to continue living in homes in the same area, Keeley said.

Geologists and planning leaders said there just is not enough evidence yet to either order evacuations on one hand, or

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allow repairs on the other.

Ancient landslide areas were reactivated by the 7.1 magnitude earthquake Oct. 17. The violent temblor left giant crescent-shaped cracks on mountainsides, marking dozens of slide scarps as large as a quarter-mile across, experts have said.

UC Santa Cruz geologist Gary Griggs told the board that giant, ancient landslides have been clearly mapped, and some are already moving deep underground.

Griggs said they have evidence of the deep movement in some areas: Deep water wells have been "sheared off at great depth" as land has begun to creep downhill. In Villa del Monte area, Griggs said the wells were sheared off at between 65 and 100 feet underground; in the Shulties Road area, they were sheared off at about 40 feet below.

Griggs and county staff geologist Paia Levine warned the board that it is impossible for any scientist to tell yet whether the earthquake-cracked ground could produce quick-moving killer landslides, such as the Love Creek slide that buried seven homes and killed 10 people in Boulder Creek in 1982.

It is believed to be a low probability, but it can't be ruled out, and therefore reconstruction and major repairs on homes in the landslide areas would be foolish, Griggs said.

"I feel any reconstruction at this time poses a risk... we don't know what to expect," Griggs said.