

Lompico area still suffers quake-caused water woes

Earthquake 1989 -

San Lorenzo Valley

By MARIA GAURA
Sentinel staff writer

11-22-89

SANTA CRUZ — Running water, or the lack of it, has been a minor concern for most county residents since the Oct. 17 earthquake.

Most neighborhoods never lost their water service after the quake, and the majority of those that did had it restored within two or three days.

But in the mountain community of Lompico, taking a morning shower still can't be taken for granted.

The Lompico Water District was badly hit by the earthquake, losing half its storage tanks and breaking dozens of water mains. District staff has worked frantically to repair the damage, but the struggle is far from over.

Just when the aged, patchwork water distribution system seems to be patched together, more problems develop.

Since Oct. 17 workers have plugged countless leaks, repaired miles of pipes, installed a temporary holding tank and worked without a day off. But in the past week a major filter pump expired, halving the system's capacity, at the same time a key well pump conked out.

Then another major water main broke, bringing parched residents and frustrated staff workers to the brink of despair.

"Everything we're dealing with now is really minimal," said Ross Foulk, president of the Lompico Water Board. "There's minimal storage, minimal (water) pro-

duction, and minimal stability in the distribution system. The constant main breaks will continue as the earth shifts, and there's nothing we can do but keep parts on hand to respond as they happen."

Signs have been posted on trees warning "Temporary outages, please conserve. Your neighbor may be out of water." District officials have applied for disaster funding to repair the system, but haven't seen any money yet, Foulk said. Cases of bottled water are available at the district office.

The little water district served 483 homes before the quake, but property damage was so widespread in the area that Foulk now guesses there are only 430 to 440 homes left.

"We have to go read the meters and see how big the new district is," Foulk said.

The county's other water districts have restored service to their customers, but repair bills keep mounting.

The San Lorenzo Valley Water District, which serves about 5,400 homes in the Boulder Creek area, has tallied a whopping \$1 million repair bill so far.

"That's big money for a small company," said District Manager Jim Mueller.

District customers all have water service now, although parts of the system are operating with temporary hardware. The sprawling water system suffered more than 80 main breaks and countless other problems in the quake.

Citizens Utilities of Felton re-

stored service within hours of the quake, but many customers had low water pressure due to 40 breaks in water mains. The utility hasn't estimated the cost of its damage yet, according to Superintendent Tom Raffaelli.

The Scotts Valley Water District suffered only \$17,400 in damage, with one main break and minor damage to one tank.

The City of Santa Cruz Water Department suffered \$350,000 worth of damage to its system, including 83 main breaks, according to Director Bill Kocher. About \$100,000 of that amount is for damage to Loch Lomond Reservoir.

Santa Cruz is still short of water, Kocher said, and restrictions on water use will stay in effect until the end of December.

About 95 percent of the customers of the Soquel Creek Water District never lost water service, according to District Manager Bob Johnson. The customers that did have problems were in the mountain areas near Aptos, primarily the Cathedral Drive neighborhood.

"You can't get closer to the epicenter than that," Johnson said.

The cost of the damage to the Soquel Creek system isn't known yet, as district officials are still studying whether it will be possible to save the 300,000 gallon Pringle water tank.

Watsonville's city water system suffered a "couple hundred thousand dollars worth" of damage, but few customers lost water service at any time, according to City Finance Director Terry Stigall.