

City officials assessing earthquake damage

BY DAVID BURGE
STAFF WRITER

As dawn broke this morning, the city of Watsonville got a good idea of the damage caused by last night's big earthquake.

The downtown area, particularly the City Plaza section of Main Street, looked like a war zone.

Virtually every store on that section of Main Street had extensive damage. Ford's Department Store, for instance, had a monstrous crack in its facing just to the left of the store logo. The store also suffered major damage to display windows.

Ford's, however, was not alone. Almost every store on Main Street suffered some kind of window breakage. The old brick buildings were hit especially hard.

The International Order of Odd Fellows building at the corner of East Beach and Union streets was heavily damaged. Its brick facing on the upper levels of the building crumbled, demolishing several vehicles that had

been parked below.

"I don't think the floods we had a few years ago did as much damage as this," said Jim Evans of the Watsonville Post Office. "At least, the water went away."

Watsonville resident Bob Horn agreed.

"I've been through those bad quakes in Southern California," he said. "This is the worst I've seen. I thought the one in LA in 1970 or 1971 was bad, but that didn't compare to this one."

Main Street wasn't the only area to sustain extensive quake damage. Along Riverside Drive and Lincoln Street, numerous houses were knocked off their foundations. On Freedom Boulevard, the sign outside the Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet was bent at a precarious angle.

The damage was so widespread that hundreds of people were forced to evacuate their homes. Some left because they felt their residences were damaged so badly that it was unsafe to stay. Others were afraid to

What you should do now

What to do now that the quake is over:

- Insurance officials say the most important thing to do is take precautions to prevent further damage. Board up broken windows, cover damaged roofs.

- To file a claim on earthquake insurance policies, call your firm's 800 number.

- Emergency workers advise that all persons should wear sturdy shoes, to protect themselves from broken glass and all the other hazards to feet resulting from the quake.

- Clean up all broken glass and any flammable liquids, such as gasoline or liquor.

- Check all power and gas connections for breaks and leaks and report any damage to the appropriate companies as soon as

possible.

- When checking cupboards and closets, proceed cautiously, since contents may fall out when the door is opened.

- If possible, fill your bathtub with water to use and drink.

- If your water heater has not been damaged, the water inside it is drinkable. So is the water in your toilet tank, unless you use disinfectant or cleaner in it.

- The Santa Cruz County health officer has cautioned that all tap water should be purified before drinking, either by boiling it or putting in eight drops of chlorine bleach per gallon and letting it sit for 30 minutes.

Santa Cruz County officials have urged all residents to stay home and start cleaning up.

return home because of the close to 30 aftershocks the area experienced.

As a result, Callaghan Park and grassy area around Geiser Field at Watsonville High School looked like refugee camps.

Some people were fully prepared for camping out, equipped with tents, radios, lots of food and Coleman stoves to do the cooking.

David Munoz of Lynbrook Court was fairly typical of the people staying at Callaghan Park.

"There's a lot of broken glass at my house," he said. "My wife didn't want to go back. If it was up to me, we would have stayed inside."

Munoz added that he felt the quake was pretty scary.

"Did you ever see the movie 'The Exorcist'? Remember the scene when the bed started to shake? That's what it was like."

Daniel Ramirez and his brother, Albert, brought their families to Callaghan Park because the houses in their neighborhood were leaking gas. Both indicated that everyone at the

park pulled together. People were sharing food, blankets and the latest news.

"That was the best part," Albert Ramirez said. "It was like one big family."

His brother, Daniel, agreed.

"Everyone was pulling together and comforting each other."

Debbie Ward, of Palm Avenue, had a similar tale to tell.

Like so many other people, she took her family to Callaghan Park as a place of refuge from the quake and its numerous aftershocks.

"Everything in the cupboards spilled out and the kitchen is a mess. Our TV fell over," she said. "All sorts of things like that. It was just awful."

Asked if she would spend another night at the park, Ward pondered for a few moments and said, "I really don't know. I don't want to take the kids back home until everything is cleaned up."

You get the feeling a lot of people will find themselves in the same predicament.



Neighbors Charlotte Reeder and Robert Nelson take it easy at Watsonville Community Hospital.

Kurt Ellison

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