

Trustees close Watsonville High building

Aftershocks speed process already started

By DONNA KIMURA

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WATSONVILLE — Schools officials Wednesday ordered the immediate closure of Watsonville High School's main building.

The move was triggered by Wednesday's numerous earthquakes, which added to already existing fears that the 73-year-old building is unsafe.

Officials had been planning to relocate students out of the building in the next several weeks.

"After the earthquakes this morning, it convinced me we have to move everyone out," said Carlos Rico, a Pajaro Valley Unified School District trustee.

While the students are on vacation this week, they will not be allowed in the 1917 Building, named for the year it opened, when they return to school on Monday, said Principal Tony Calvo.

Instead, they will be directed to the library or cafeteria or will share rooms with other classes until portable facilities can be arranged, he said.

Six unoccupied relocatable classrooms located on the soccer field will be prepared for use and six others will be located in the student parking lot to serve as

classrooms.

The district will also be ordering temporary facilities for administrative offices, which will be placed on an unused volleyball court.

Calvo estimated the portable classrooms will be ready for use by April 30.

The offices, however, may not be ready for about three or four weeks.

Administrators may have to work in the building temporarily, Calvo said. Teachers will also be allowed in the building to gather their supplies.

Officials began planning for the relocation of students last week after hearing that the building was built with a poor quality concrete.

Engineers also reported last week that the Oct. 17 earthquake may have weakened the structure.

"I will not support having any personnel in the building other than people who are there to make it safe," said Trustee Steve Knego.

The recent quakes probably weakened the building even more, he said.

Plaster fell in the two-story building during the temblors, Calvo said.

District's insurance broker Ed Banks told trustees that the insurance company, Industrial Indemnity, would not cancel the school's coverage, but would not expand it either.

Any liability claims would most likely be decided on a case-by-case basis, he said.