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# A kinder storm than last year

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BOULDER CREEK — Fire Chief Bud Tomlin was sitting behind his desk Wednesday afternoon at the fire station, musing about building an ark, when suddenly the alarm came in with the kind of emergency call that sends the heart aflutter.

"Boulder Creek Fire. Unknown number of men buried in mudslide. Repeat...unknown number of men buried..."

Bolting out of his chair, Tomlin muttered, "Here we go..."

The emergency vehicles tore out of the Highway 9 station faster than you can bat an eyelash, moving with red lights and sirens to the latest in a steady stream of storm-related disaster calls.

'Luckily, the mudslide was kind to its victims, just as the storm has been.

Six men working to clear another slide on the privately-owned Quigg Way were caught — but not buried — when a chunk of oozing, clay soil came tumbling down.

"We heard the redwood trees begin to crackle," said Dave Ranney, one of the road crew. Looking up the side of the mountain, they saw the slide begin to move.

"We ran like hell," said Ranney. The crew made it out with only getting their feet stuck in the muck.

The road fared a little poorer, but the crew said they'd turn their pick and shovels on the new slide.

Sighed Tomlin, "We got a break on this one."

It was shades of '82 all over Boulder Creek and its environs Wednesday as residents of at least three areas packed up their belongings and moved out of their homes threatened by sliding hillsides.

This year, divine providence has spared the county the kind of death and destruction that characterized last year's storm. But there has still been enough of the destruction to cause millions of dollars of damage.

For the Walter family, Wednesday saw the end of seven years of mountain living when the hill behind their rented home on Monte Vista Lane pushed through the back wall of their cabin.

"We're losing it," said Lynn Walter to a friend on the telephone.

While Walter was calling his workplace to say he wouldn't be back that day, volunteer firemen with Boulder Creek carried books and other belongings out of the destroyed room. The back wall was caved in, the floor was drenched in three inches of water.

But the family was intact and family members were counting their blessings.

Walter said the slide that destroyed their home began at 8 a.m. and "multiplied. It was the first time this year it's been this bad," he said. "Last year we hardly had any damage."

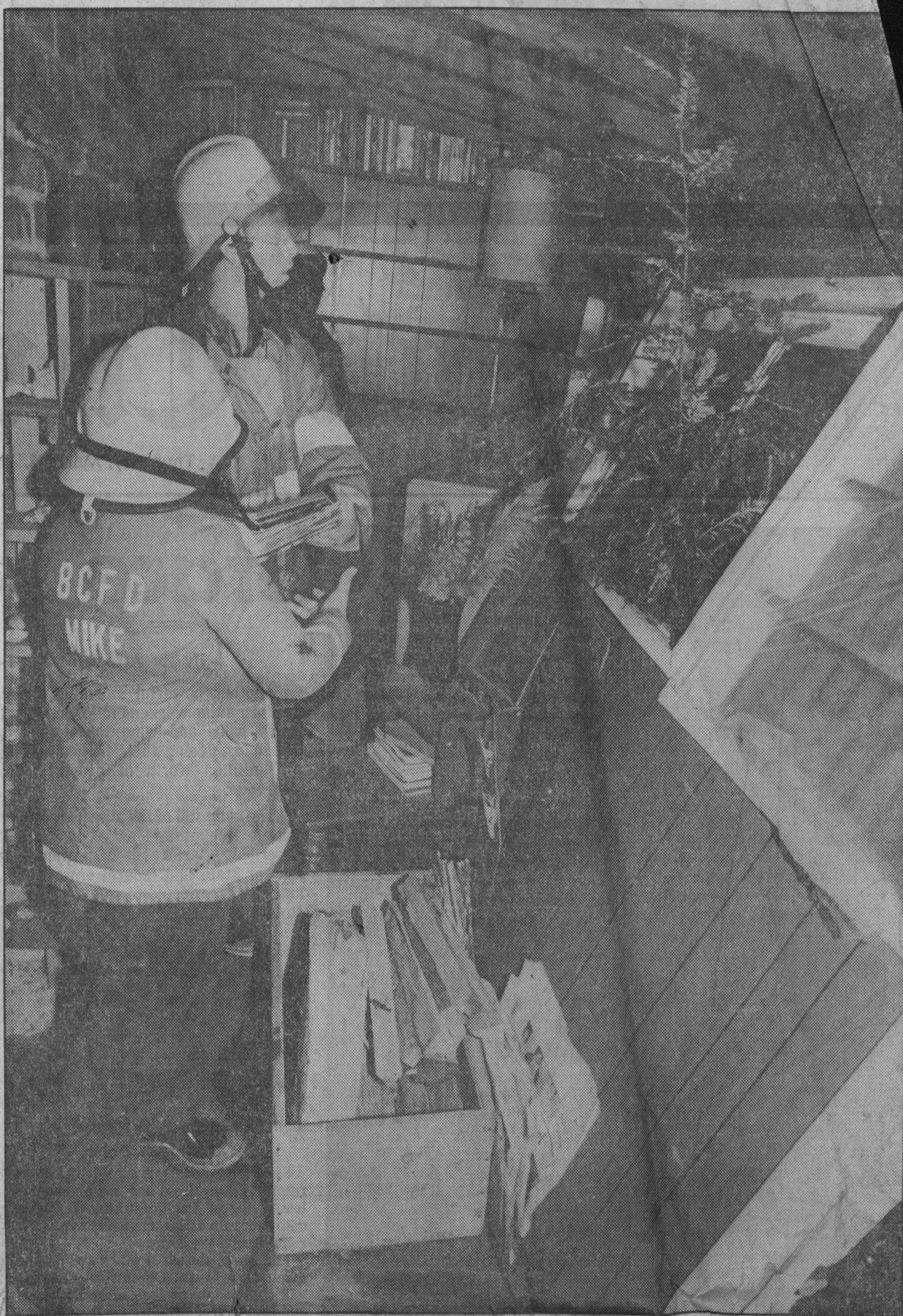
While the Walters' packed it in on Monte Vista Lane, three other families were moving from Echo Lane. Tomlin said the homes were sliding, and some 10 others in the area were threatened by the moving hillside and trees.

Later Wednesday night, three other families on Madrona Way, near Pleasant Way, left their homes when the structures began to slide, said a Boulder Creek fireman.

Sue Robinette of the County Administrative Office said county geologist David Leslie and environmental planner Tom Burns would be inspecting some of these areas today.

"We're keeping an eye on the area and warning people in some areas not to return," she said.

Why the hills are still sliding is a question many in Boulder Creek are pondering these days.



Mike Rocca and Danny Kuhnlein remove belongings from the sliding Walter home in Boulder Creek.

cycle of rainy winters. They say that 30 years ago, the mountains got a deluge every winter. Then there was a 10-year period of virtual drought.

"Last year we saw the first year of near-normal rain, if you don't count the drought years," said one fireman. "We're seeing a continuation of that. Eventually the ground will be able to soak it all up again."

If the mountains can't take the heavy rains, Tomlin says he might inquire about building an ark.

"You see those people up at the Redwood Christian Association building that looks like an ark," he said back at

