

Bleak future for Summit homes

Earthquake 1989 - San Lorenzo Valley / Summit

By MARIA GAURA 11-9-89
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SUMMIT — Due to the danger of landslides, it will be months before hundreds of Summit area residents can get county permits to repair their damaged homes — if they can get permits at all.

But many residents fear that without quick repairs, their homes will be doomed by the coming winter weather, landslides or not.

And to further complicate matters, the county does not have the money to begin studies assessing the landslide risk in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Several hundred mountain residents packed the Loma Prieta Community Center Wednesday night for a meeting with county officials and geologists that became angry and emotional.

Geologists have discovered cracks in the Summit ridgetop that could signal the beginning of massive landslides, particularly near the Villa del Monte subdivision off Summit Road. At present, nobody is sure how deep or extensive the landslides could be, how fast they could move, or if winter rains could trigger a deadly disaster.

"This is a terrible situation for homeowners," said consulting geologist Gerry Webber. "You're essentially in limbo. We don't know whether or not it's appropriate to repair homes on top of a landslide. It moved during the quake. It's not moving now. It could move in four months. It's a terrible dilemma."

The geologists' discoveries have

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put county officials in a painful position.

On the one hand, it is hard to prevent people from rebuilding or repairing their homes for months, until thorough geological studies are completed. On the other hand, it would be irresponsible to allow rebuilding on the face of what might be a half-mile-long landslide.

To complicate matters, the cost of completing a geological study of the targeted area will run in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, and the county doesn't have the money to do it. Test holes must be bored hundreds of feet deep in the suspect areas, and markers must be set and watched closely through an entire rainy season for signs of movement.

And if this winter is as dry as the last three winters have been, the study may have to be extended for another year, according to County Geologist Paia Levine.

"We have to wait until we get the information," Levine said. "The worst possible case would be to

have another dry winter."

County Supervisor Jan Beautz told the crowd that the county has applied for funding from the state and federal governments to pay for the studies, but that no money has been granted yet.

The crowd assembled in the center was very quiet at first, as the magnitude of the bad news sank in.

Some people may have to face the winter living in a damaged home. Others fear losing their homes if the area is deemed unsafe. And almost everyone faces the possibility of a killer landslide this winter.

Homeowners have the option of paying for minor repairs on their damaged homes, but stand a chance of losing their investment if the area is condemned.

As the meeting wore on, more and more people became angry and emotional. Many criticized the county for slow work, and called on officials to "do something," but county officials said they are doing

as much as they can, as fast as they can.

"I can't imagine hearing a news report that said 'A jumbo jet has come down in the Santa Cruz Mountains yesterday, and county officials are desperately trying to find money for an emergency rescue,'" said Villa del Monte resident Andy Reichert. "Negligence is spelled with a very big N."

Teams of geologists have been combing the mountains for three weeks, Levine said, and have put together a map with circles locating several "areas of critical concern" where landslides appear to be a danger.

The largest critical area is the Summit neighborhoods, but geologists have also identified potential slides in the Pinecrest Road area, the Rebecca Drive/Nina Terrace area, Upper Vine Hill Road and Jarvis Road, Amaya Ridge and Longridge, Fern Flat Road near Aptos View and Rider Road.

Some of the areas have only gotten preliminary review, and Levine said that some could be taken off

the critical list in the next few weeks if closer inspection shows a low level of danger.

County officials will hold another community meeting at the Loma Prieta Community Center Nov. 29.