

Wind rakes county

Trees topple

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LIVE OAK — Michelle Makel knew it was just a matter of time before it fell.

Monday morning was time.

Strong northerly winds gusted more than 50 mph, knocked out power and sent Christmas garlands flying throughout the county. The wind also finally uprooted the Monterey pine on Roland Drive in Live Oak.

The tree smashed three cars, slicing through them, and damaged a fourth. It fell less than a dozen steps from the doors of several homes, but didn't damage them.

Today should be less windy, with some high clouds.

Maker said she had stayed up late to wrap presents and had just gone to bed, shortly after 1 a.m. The wind had been whipping and snapping tree branches all evening. Boy, did it blow. But it was nothing like the crash, she said.

"Oh my god. It was so outrageous," Maker said. "I heard this creaking noise, and then this earth-shattering crash and the lights were gone."

Maker said she woke her husband and said, "The tree finally fell." They took their flashlights to



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

After gusting winds uprooted this tree on Roland Drive in Live Oak, it crushed two vans and a car and damaged another.

check it out and then called 911.

Makel said that for years she'd watched the tree on her neighbor's property, knowing it would fall someday. Several other pines on the street had been removed. Another tree next to the fallen one is leaning precariously. "This one is next," Makel predicted.

Christine Thomas, whose two cars were crushed, didn't wake up when the tree fell. Firefighters with Central Fire, checking to see if anyone had been injured, woke her up.

Nearby on Lakeview Road in Live Oak, Gary Arnold was dealing with another uprooted tree.

A 75-foot cypress in Arnold's front yard fell toward his neighbor's home at about 11 p.m. Sunday. The tip of the tree landed on the neighbor's balcony.

"She got herself a Christmas tree right on the balcony," observed Arnold.

The tree knocked a rain gutter and damaged the balcony deck, but missed the main structure. Nobody was home at the time, Arnold said.

Arnold said a number of trees, mostly eucalyptus trees, have fallen in the area the past several years. County ordinance prohibits cutting them because they provide habitat for butterflies.

Arnold, watching the winds whip the trees Monday morning, said he hoped to get county officials to change their minds.

The winds kept Pacific Gas & Electric Co. crews busy throughout the county.

Winds broke a steel cross arm on a power pole on Santa Cruz's Westside, knocking out power to the downtown area until midafter-



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Gary Arnold with the 75-foot cypress that fell in Live Oak.

noon, said Scott Blakey, PG&E spokesman.

At about 5 a.m., when the winds gusted the hardest, about 11,000 customers were without power, he said.

By midafternoon, almost 300 customers in Santa Cruz were still powerless. Another 160 customers in Watsonville, about 55 in Corralitos and other scattered pockets, were also without power.

Rick Grove's power in Aptos went out in the third quarter of the 49er's game Sunday evening and was still out Monday afternoon. That's not unusual, he complained.

"This is something that has happened many times in the past years," he said. "There are about 10 of us without power, consistently."

Grove said the portion of Larson Road that he lives on apparently hasn't been mapped properly by PG&E. Residents have tried to fix the problem, many times, but to no avail.

"We've got a big party tomorrow and here we are with no power and 50 kids coming to my house," said Grove.

The strong winds were reported throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. The National Weather Service said that gusts at San Francisco International Airport at 3 a.m. Monday were clocked up to 44 mph.

Gusts 40 to 50 mph were clocked in the East Bay hills.

At Pigeon Point, near Pescadero, sustained winds were clocked at 39 mph, said Miguel Miller of the National Weather Service.

With the wind chill factored in, temperatures dipped to the single digits along ridge tops in the Santa Cruz Mountains, he said.

A wind advisory remained in effect through the afternoon for elevations above 1,000 feet in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Wind at the higher elevations was expected to gust up to 50 mph at some locations.