

## Obituaries

# Driving Hwy. 17 is still awful

## Rules keep shifting in wake of the quake

By Michelle Guido  
Mercury News Staff Writer

Traffic on Highway 17 was worse than ever Saturday, and the rules for driving over the mountain changed — so many times, in fact, that even transportation officials were having a hard time keeping track.

And while officials passed the buck — and the blame — mountain residents couldn't get to their homes, and thousands of people waited to be led over the hill, in some cases for up to three hours in backs-ups of three miles or more.

"It's a mess. To say the least it's a big mess," said San Jose CHP officer Gary Renstom. "Caltrans keeps changing the rules. We (CHP) don't make the policy, we only enforce it."

California Highway Patrol officers said Saturday the highway south of Los Gatos would be open only to residents and emergency vehicles. That will be the rule from now on, they said, except during special commute hours when 2-person car pools and buses also will be allowed.

To make matters worse, Highway 9 is closed between Highway 35 (Skyline Boulevard) and Highway 236 so that 5,000 cubic yards of earth can be removed to help prevent more landslides in the area.

The Highway 17 rules were supposed to be simple: beginning Monday, officials had said, traffic would be restricted to residents with identification, emergency vehicles, buses, and car pools of three or more. But by Thursday, many lone drivers were able to pass through CHP checkpoints with no questions asked.

Now, officials said, the general public will be able to drive over Highway 17 only from 5 a.m. to 9 a.m.

See HIGHWAY 17, Page 10B

THE QUAKE  
OF  
**89**

# Driving is still slow or no go on Hwy. 17

HIGHWAY 17, from Page 1B

and 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. — and only if there are two or more people in each car.

"This thing has changed so often," said Bob Halligan, Caltrans spokesman.

But Caltrans insists the travel restrictions are being enforced more rigidly now so that road crews can perform repair work on the highway, which was damaged substantially by the Oct. 17 earthquake and ensuing aftershocks.

"We have very few options up there," Halligan said. "If we don't do something the whole road is going to close. We're trying to accommodate the people who have to go through there. But it's less than an ideal situation."

**'It's gonna be hell on  
Monday . . . '**

— David Bates,  
mountain resident

That comes as no surprise to highway drivers and mountain residents.

David Bates, who lives in the Santa Cruz Mountains, went into Los Gatos Saturday — and he couldn't get home. When he got on Highway 17 at 4 p.m., traffic was "stopped from the Cats bar near the Lexington Reservoir to Camden Avenue" in San Jose. So he gave up, and went to a relative's home to wait it out.

"Every time we go a few miles into town, we can't get back," Bates said. "They (Caltrans and CHP) keep changing their policies constantly and the mountain residents don't know what the hell is going on. We're trying to get back to normal, and everybody up there is just totally confused."

"It's gonna be hell on Monday . . . and we're caught in the squeeze."