



Via Gaviota residents score county inaction

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APTOS — Don't mention Santa Cruz County officials around residents of storm-ravaged Via Gaviota in Aptos.

Residents of the million-dollar-per-home area are criticizing the county for what they call a "lack of concern" in the aftermath of last week's destruction by crashing waves.

County officials have termed it "personal losses," saying they can't use public funds on private property.

The residents, however, say that if they hadn't taken it upon themselves to install an estimated \$100,000 worth of rock rip-rap protection the past few days, their beachfront homes might be rubble by now.

Several residents have joined and brought in about 75 truckloads of huge boulders, totaling some 3,000 tons. They have been placed at the end of Via Gaviota and behind the four southernmost homes at the end. Work ended Saturday on the three-day project.

According to LeRoy Johnson, a retired architect and former president of the Seascape Beach Association, an estimated 1,800 tons of rock — some 45 truckloads — were placed at the end of Via Gaviota where the street now abruptly drops 25 feet into the sea. Another 1,200 tons of rock, or 30 truckloads, were brought in at low tide and trucked around to protect the four homes on the southerly end of the street.

Those homes already have been severely undercut by set after set of waves. While it is not yet known how extensive sub-structural damage might be, residents have already moved whatever possessions they could save out.

Johnson, whose home sits just across the street from the damaged homes, has worked closely with neighbor Ed DiSilva in spearheading the project. DiSilva, who lives in one of the damaged homes, owns a construction company in Hayward. He sent a caravan of 24 earth-hauling equipment to the neighborhood immediately.

While some of the residents are praising DiSilva, they're blaming the county.

"The county hasn't even been out here," said Johnson. "They didn't even consider we might use a little hand holding if nothing else. While they conjugated, the whole place could have went."

He backtracked a bit, though, by saying Second (Aptos) District Supervisor Robley Levy toured the area recently at the residents' request.

"She (Levy) offered us little encouragement, saying these were 'personal losses' only," said Johnson. "The implication was that we were rich enough to take care of ourselves."

"The lack of concern was evident," he added. "But, they sure love our tax base."

County Administrative Officer George Newell told The Sentinel this morning just about what Levy has said in the past. "We can't extend public funds on private property damage. If it's private, it's the responsibility of the individual."

The county Sanitation District has worked at the other end of Via Gaviota. That work, however, was only to place some rock protection around a sewer manhole that was threatened.

As residents clustered outside Sunday looking at their efforts, they reiterated that at least one home and 50 feet of the street would be gone were it not for the rock protection.

While the residents aren't holding their breath awaiting county help, they are hopeful a pending emergency declaration by the state might help reimburse them for their expenses.

State Sen. Henry Mello this morning said he had hand-delivered to Gov. George Deukmejian's office the Board of Supervisors' request for the emergency request.

It is expected Deukmejian will make the proclamation today and then send it on to Washington for a federal disaster area proclamation.

In the meantime, however, Via Gaviota residents are already talking about more protection, such as a new permanent seawall.

"We had a crisis that had to be met," said Johnson. "A decision had to be made and action taken. We took it upon ourselves to do it."



Jim Ballentine

Aerial photo shows damaged Via Gaviota homes and rocks hauled in by residents.