



Karen T. Borchers — Mercury News

Gabriel Tapia, 3, of Santa Cruz, peers out from the tent his family made by draping blankets over garbage cans

Santa Cruz mourns, copes

Bush tours shattered city

By Lee Quarnstrom, Bob Levy and David M. Kutzmann

It was a day of VIP tours and national media attention.

But when President Bush and his entourage left Santa Cruz County on Friday, residents rattled by four days of quakes, landslides and aftershocks were left to cope with mounting losses — now estimated at \$1 billion — and an increasingly difficult road to recovery.

Those difficulties were punctuated by a sharp aftershock — 4.0 on the Richter scale — that rumbled through the county Friday at 5:49 p.m.

Bush, accompanied by local and state officials, walked through the shattered Pacific Garden Mall on a chilly, overcast day that seemed perfectly suited for the somber occasion. The question on the minds of merchants and residents was how long it would take before recovery efforts get under way.

"He had an opportunity to see what the human impact of this has been, to walk down the street in the dust and smell that acrid smell of plaster," said Santa Cruz Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt.

County officials delivered a letter to Bush asking that federal assistance be quickly arranged. The officials also asked that four FEMA offices be opened in the county: in Watsonville, Felton, Santa Cruz and somewhere in the midcounty area to serve Aptos, Soquel and other small communities.

The Santa Cruz City Council, meeting in an emergency session after the president left, agreed to declare a citywide moment of silence at 5 p.m. Tuesday, one week after the quake hit, "to mourn those who lost their lives and to celebrate the outpouring of warmth that has sustained us through this tragedy."

Santa Cruz County's quake losses have been staggering. Five people were killed after Tuesday's temblor. About 2,000 were injured. Emergency services officials estimated that 8,000 of the county's 229,000 residents were forced from their homes.

Three hundred homes were destroyed, and 5,000 more were seriously damaged. About 150 businesses were leveled and 1,000 others damaged. Of the \$1 billion in estimated damage, \$800 million was to private property.

But progress — hampered by recurrent aftershocks — was evident in several key areas. Power was restored to all but 446 customers in the county by Friday.

Reconstruction phase ahead

Emergency officials said 6,000 feet of chain-link fence is being shipped to Santa Cruz to cordon off the mall area as the city moves into what officials termed the reconstruction phase.

Still, the remnants of shattered lives were visible all around town. On the roads, car after car passed by with mounds of clothing or bedding piled high

in back. On the sidewalks, people moved slowly. They stopped and stared downtown, remembering what was there, jolted by what is gone.

But they knew they are the lucky ones. They survived.

"You feel really thankful just to be alive," said Mary Quillin, 31, as she walked down Myrtle Street, where every other home on the block has been condemned.

Quillin and her friend, Frank Menagh, said their house on Bixby would be OK. They were walking down Myrtle "to see what's happened, how much our town has lost."

Watsonville also suffered heavy damage from Tuesday's quake.

"Our town is a mess. Main Street is a wreck," said Watsonville Mayor Betty Murphy.

Three shelters set up

Three shelters have been set up for displaced residents in Watsonville, but officials said it has been difficult to get the newly homeless to use them.

Four days after the quake, there also were the first hints of criticism at the way Santa Cruz officials have treated earthquake planning, including remarks from the city's former chief building inspector. Two years ago, he proposed an earthquake safety ordinance that received a cool reception in the city.

The proposal by Dave Steeves initially called for virtual reconstruction of buildings in the downtown area, but Steeves said he really intended to provide havens inside buildings where people could go during an earthquake. Three people died in the city during Tuesday's temblor.

"Those people's lives are on their heads, not mine," Steeves said, referring to the council members who failed to embrace his plan. "They were derelict in their duties in not providing proper public safety."

Councilman John Laird called Steeves' charges "ridiculous."

"Every crisis brings out finger-pointing at some point, and I'm sorry it's happening now before we can deal with the problems in front of us."

Santa Cruz Planning Director Peter Katzlberger, Steeves' boss and one of those he blames for ignoring his proposal, said it would have resulted "in the economic death of downtown."

Katzlberger also said the idea "succeeded in having the whole issue (of earthquake safety) put off by scaring people."

"What's the point of having a great idea if you can't get people to accept it?" he asked.

Steeves came up with the proposal in response to a state law enacted after an earthquake in May 1983 destroyed much of downtown Coalinga. The law required cities and counties to survey their buildings, identify those that would be unsafe in an earthquake, send that information to the state and affected property owners, and come up with a "mitigation" plan by January 1990.

Steeves said he found about 175 buildings, including 45 on the mall, that were not earthquake-safe. But he freely admits that even if his proposal had been adopted, it is unlikely the required work would have been completed — or even started — by the time Tuesday's quake hit.