

Laguna Beach sets flooding, mudslide damage toll at \$10.2 million

Nardine Saad, Los Angeles Times, 12-29-10

Laguna Beach sustained about \$10.2 million in damage due to severe flooding and mudslides during last week's rainstorms, officials said Tuesday.

“We did not expect damage to this magnitude,” City Manager John Pietig said.

Downtown Laguna Beach and Laguna Canyon Road suffered the most damage. Cleanup efforts were underway shortly after flooding began in the city late Wednesday, Pietig said. “It was a real team effort involving public and private partnerships, and the community and businesses were very cooperative,” he said.

More than 30 residences received moderate to major damage from flooding and mud flows; some were inundated with mud and water as high as six feet. The cost of cleanup and losses adds up to about \$4 million, officials said.

The Willowbrook campus of the Anneliese Schools at the intersection of El Toro and Laguna Canyon roads was the worst-hit structure and will cost about \$900,000 to repair. The campus is bifurcated by the Laguna Canyon Creek and was overrun by water, mud and debris. It's likely that the school will need to set up portable facilities to stay open, Pietig said.

The Laguna Beach Animal Shelter sustained about \$800,000 in damage to computers, medical equipment and structural damage to bridges that lead to the facility.

Most of the 59 businesses and commercial structures that were flooded in the downtown area reopened Tuesday. Battered inventory in stores made up the bulk of the \$3.5 million worth of damage. Retail sales and tourism took a serious hit during the holiday season, said Judith Biglani, executive director for the Laguna Beach Visitors & Conference Bureau.

“Having had this happen before Christmas is a challenge so it's really important that we let people know that we're back,” she said. “The streets are clear and you can walk on the beaches again.”

The city will offer free parking during New Year's celebrations to draw visitors back. The Transportation Corridor Agencies also reopened all on- and off-ramps of the 133 Toll Road and southbound lanes on the 241 Toll Road on Tuesday. But officials said they will need to assess damage from the incoming storm system before deciding to reopen a five-mile stretch of the 241's northbound lanes.