

Storm lets up, leaves wreckage; mudslide in La Conchita, battered boats wash ashore

Kyle Rokes, Santa Barbara Independent, 12-24-10

The storm, for now, has passed.

In its wake lay a La Conchita landslide, some fallen trees, many potholes, and several crushed vehicles, including one mangled Hummer.

And early Wednesday morning, the storms flung two boats onto the sands of East Beach.

“We ask every boat owner, permanent or transient, to watch the weather,” said Sgt. Ed Stetson of the Santa Barbara Harbor Patrol.

“When a storm comes, move it into the marina,” he said.

The Harbor Patrol contacted the owner of the larger 41 foot long vessel, but he is currently out of the country.

Plans to haul it back into the water or someplace else will be necessary, but Stetson said in the end, that’s the boat owner’s responsibility.

The Harbor Patrol has been unable to reach the owner of the shorter 25 foot boat that washed ashore.

Stetson said that for the time boats stay on the beach, the city considers them a “pollution hazard and a nuisance.”

“We don’t want kids coming across it thinking it’s something they can play on and then get hurt,” he said.

Talk of heavy winds, rain, hail, and thunder dominated recent forecasts.

But the devastating rains that many expected proved false.

The storm front’s mighty winds turned on itself.

They churned and hurled the low pressure system away from here.

Stars twinkled through breaking clouds last night as families and couples enjoyed a crisp but dry evening of shopping downtown.

Although some on the Ventura border were reminded yesterday of a far more grave and costly winter five years ago.

A mudslide about 12,000 square feet in area barreled down a slope in La Conchita on Wednesday.

Firefighters evacuated four houses. No one has been reported injured or missing.

“We consider this whole area geologically unstable,” said Ron Oakman, public information officer for the Ventura County fire department.

Today's event paled in comparison to the mudslide that killed 10 people, destroyed 13 homes, and damaged 18 more Jan. 10, 2005.

Oakman described it as a surface landslide; that means it was mostly topsoil loosened by water and not a sea of heavier material churned from deeper in the ground.

He also said that even though sheriff's deputies advised residents to vacate, they can't by law be forced to leave.

However, the four households contacted by firefighters complied.

Initially, the slide was thought much smaller. Authorities responded to a report of one 400 square feet in area.

But upon arrival, a county geologist confirmed the correct size.

He also determined increased danger only if heavy rains persisted.

As of now, that looks unlikely.

"If the rain gives way," said Oakman, "it is what it is."

In Santa Barbara the rain let up, but don't let the blue skies fool you.

“There's been partial clearing behind the lower pressure system,” said meteorologist Jamie Meier, of The National Weather Service in Oxnard. “That'll warm the surface and that warming will evaporate a lot of moisture.”

In turn, that moisture will mix with the low pressure cloud coverage.

Instant thunderstorms.

Meier reports that lightning has already struck off coast on the Channel islands.

The winds have died down considerably.

“Which is good,” Meier said adding, “we're not as concerned about the damage it would've caused.”

Although heavy rains in the area of the Jesusita fire raised alarms.

“We came close to issuing a flash flood warning,” she said.

But no such announcement turned out to warranted.

However, the threat of hail is still valid.

Meier said hail likes a rise in temperature, too.