

San Pablo landslide damages six homes

Tom Lochner and Robert Salonga, Bay Area News Group, 3-26-11

A landslide triggered by heavy rains rushed through a half-dozen San Pablo backyards Thursday, leaving fissures and moving debris and chunks of hillside.

Homes affected by the landslide are in the 5900 block of Wyman Street and the 5900 block of Hillcrest Road, according to the city.

As of Friday afternoon, the damage appeared to be limited mostly to backyards, but Blanka Walker's family home on Wyman Street is now at the edge of a precipice and she's worried.

Walker was alerted to the first wave of damage at 3 p.m. Thursday, when her 5-year-old daughter, Daniella, said, "Mom, we have no more backyard," Walker recalled.

"I didn't believe it until I looked out. It was gone."

Since then, the landslide has broken a large concrete slab into pieces and left a gaping hole.

Walker called the city Thursday, but was told it was a private property issue, she said. She then called media outlets. City representatives, including Mayor Paul Morris, showed up Friday morning. Someone from the city came back to look at her family's house again shortly before 4 p.m., she said.

"They took another look, and found no noticeable structural damage," said her husband, Leon Walker. "They didn't yellow- or red-tag it. But they will be coming by every 12 hours to check."

Blanka Walker said the Red Cross told her it would house the family in temporary shelter if their home is deemed unsafe.

City crews are working with homeowners to stem the landslide, according to a news release from the city.

That's welcome news to the Walker family.

"There's a resident down the hill that has an aluminum tool shed," Leon Walker said. "Every time the slide moves, you can hear a popping sound."

He said a city official told him Friday afternoon that the city owns two properties -- empty lots on Hillcrest Road -- affected by the slide.

"It's not a private property issue anymore," he said, "so they're going to send a soil engineer today or tomorrow."

Blanka Walker called her insurer earlier and was told the damage stems from flooding, and that because she doesn't have flood insurance, "I'm pretty much out of luck," she said.

She wasn't satisfied with that response and will continue to pursue a claim, she said.