

Slides Continue To Threaten Bay Area Homes

Several residential areas near hillsides in the Bay Area are at risk to landslides

Maureen Naylor, KTVU (Oakland television), 3-29-11

MORGAN HILL -- Four homes in Hercules have been red tagged, a San Pablo neighborhood wrestles with a hillside creeping ever closer to a row of houses and residents in Morgan Hill and the Santa Cruz Mountains remain isolated by slides.

Even though the sun was out Tuesday, the toll from a wet onslaught during March has washed to the surface a time bomb ticking beneath the Bay Area's picturesque hills.

"It's ironic that some of the best looking home sites in mountainous areas tend to be on landslides," said Chris Wills of the California Geological Survey. "People don't tend to recognize it until long after they have built their homes."

The California Geological Survey, not to be confused with U.S. Geological Survey, is a division of the state Department of Conservation.

Acutely aware of the slide dangers within the state, the CGS has charted out the danger zones in the Bay Area. Among them are the hills in Pacifica, Fremont, Milpitas and the hills around the Almaden Valley in the South Bay.

"There are a lot of places in California where we have relatively weak rocks and steep slopes," Wills told KTVU. "And those places are prone to landslides."

March's stormy weather brought home just how threatening the slides can be to residents throughout the Bay Area.

On Tuesday, the Hercules City Council was set to consider declaring a local state of emergency in an effort to secure state funding to help stop a landslide that has rendered four homes uninhabitable and is threatening four more, city spokeswoman Michelle Harrington said.

A grassy foothill in the 200 block of Carson Street has been slowly creeping into homes for years, but recent rainstorms have sped up its progress, Harrington said.

"The hill has basically come into the homes," Harrington said.

Last week, the city red-tagged four homes, all of which had previously been vacated because of the slide, and disconnected the utilities to those homes.

The homes, which have broken windows from the hill's intrusion, are now serving as a retaining wall to prevent the earth from moving into the street, Harrington said.

On Monday, the city's chief building official yellow-tagged four more homes that are now being threatened by the slide.

Meanwhile in San Pablo, the city remained in emergency response mode Tuesday to protect lives and property following last week's landslide.

The landslide was reported Thursday afternoon behind six homes in the 5900 block of Wyman Street and the 5900 block of Hillcrest Road.

The city issued an emergency declaration Sunday afternoon as mud continued to creep closer to the homes.

Three homes on Hillcrest Road and Wyman Street remain yellow tagged, meaning they can only be accessed on a limited basis, city officials said.