

Crews removing slide-damaged Lake County homes

Glenda Anderson, Santa Rosa Press Democrat, 10-2-13

A mass of splintered lumber and broken stucco is all that remains of Scott Spivey's Tudor-style dream home in a landslide-plagued subdivision overlooking Clear Lake.

"It's just a shame," Spivey said in a videotaped interview with Lake County News.

A construction crew on Monday knocked down what was left of Spivey's home, which, along with 16 others, was badly damaged by a landslide earlier this year.

The crew is now in the process of removing the debris from that home and half of a duplex next door.

The damaged duplex already had collapsed. "It fell of its own accord," said Randall Fitzgerald, president of the Lakeside Heights Homeowners Association.

The other half of the duplex appears to be salvageable, county officials said.

The county ordered that the damaged and destroyed homes be abated and hired a contractor to do the work for \$64,000.

Who ultimately pays for the abatements and property damage caused by the subdivision's landslides is expected to be decided in court.

The landslide damage to seven homes in the subdivision was severe enough for the county to order evacuations. It issued voluntary evacuation notices for 10 others after the ground beneath them began slipping away in March.

County Community Development Director Richard Coel said Tuesday that at least two other homes need to be torn down but they don't pose an immediate danger to people or other structures.

The hillside where Spivey's home was located, however, could block a main road and only public access to a nearby hospital if it continued to slide, he said.

"The last thing we want is a mudslide," Coel said.

Once the structures are removed, the construction team will re-contour the slope, install drains and cover it with plastic, Coel said. The work will be done by Oct. 15 in order to beat the winter rains, he said.

It's unclear what will happen to the remaining homes in the 1980s-era subdivision built in the hills just north of Lakeport.

With nearly half of the 29 homes empty, the subdivision is a ghost of its former self.

Even owners of some apparently sound homes have chosen to walk away from their properties, which have lost much of their value because of the landslides, Fitzgerald said.

"Nobody wants to buy a home next to a landslide," said Santa Rosa attorney Michael Green, who represents the subdivision's landowners.

Even renters are shunning the subdivision, Fitzgerald said.

The cause, or causes, of the landslides are in dispute. Subdivision residents blame the county and are planning a lawsuit. They contend ruptured county water lines caused the ground to become saturated and slide.

County officials have blamed subdivision irrigation pipes and the possibility of poor soil compaction and shoddy construction.

Green said he expects to file a lawsuit against the county “soon.”

Fitzgerald said it's the only way for the homeowners to survive the financial blow because the landslide-caused “subsidence” isn't covered under their insurance policies.

“Unless we want to walk away from our mortgages, file for personal bankruptcy and live under a bridge somewhere, we don't have any other option,” he said.