

County undertaking \$4.7 million project to stabilize moving hillside in Hacienda Heights

Juliette Funes, Los Angeles Newspaper Group, 4-8-10

HACIENDA HEIGHTS -- The county is launching a \$4.7 million project to stabilize a residential hillside that was the site of a major landslide in the 1980s and is still slowly moving.

On April 15 workers will begin installing a groundwater control program between Montellano Avenue and Heatherfield Drive.

Right now, the county depends on pumps to keep water off the slopes, said Mike Montgomery of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works.

"This whole system relies on pumps, which can be unreliable," he said. "We're looking for a more long-term resolution. It's much better to rely on a passive system rather than a mechanical system."

Public Works will install 22 horizontal drains and vertical wells at the site to decrease the amount of groundwater.

The repairs are expected to be completed in July.

"We hope to dramatically increase the amount of water coming out with these 22 wells and drains," Montgomery said. "It's a pretty common way of dealing with a problem like this."

The hillside was constructed in the 1960s and suffered a catastrophic landslide in 1983, causing a section of Montellano Avenue to be closed until 1999.

Several homes were removed and dirt was redistributed from the top of the hill to the bottom to counteract the movement, Montgomery said.

"Landslides are kind of like a balancing act. The more dirt you move downward, the less movement you have," he said.

However, during a heavy rain season in 2005, the hillside collected water from a canyon up higher in the hills and started to move again, he said.

Officials pumped out as much as 3,000 gallons of water a day, Montgomery said.

The water expanded the hillside, he said.

"Water not only adds weight to a landslide, but creates a buoyancy force," he said. "These canyons collect water from the land above, and the fill is actually moving."

Despite the continued movement, only one home is threatened by the landslide. The county recently bought the house, and Montgomery wasn't sure it could be saved.

"This is a maintenance project," he said. "As long as we can keep the groundwater level down, it's safe."

For the duration of the three- month project, impact to the surrounding community will be minimal, he said.

"Residents are going to expect big drill rigs that probably won't close the street, but there will be a lot of trucks carrying gravel," he said, adding that a community outreach meeting is being planned.