

Chunk of San Pedro cliff falls into ocean

Donna Littlejohn, Los Angeles Newspaper Group, 12-2-09

A chunk of earth fell away from San Pedro's south-facing cliffs over the weekend, prompting city engineers and geologists to cordon off part of the area Tuesday as they assessed the situation.

It's unclear what caused the mini-slide, which occurred in the 1800 block of West Paseo del Mar - across the street from the White Point Nature Preserve near Weymouth Avenue. But there was some speculation about high tide or some rain that hit the area early one morning.

"The county Department of Public Works and Department of Beaches and Harbors are coordinating efforts with the city of Los Angeles to evaluate the slide and to make sure that roadway is safe," said Dusty Crane, division chief of community and marketing for the county Department of Beaches and Harbors.

"They all feel the roadway is safe but they are putting barricades up so no one can go down the service road as they start monitoring and waiting for the geologist report."

The water along the shoreline below was still a muddy brown color from the fallen dirt and rocks.

The area is a popular stretch for walkers and joggers.

Manuel Montelongo, a lifelong San Pedro resident, said the slide wiped out a trail he and his family have used for years to access the shore below.

"No more trail," he said as he walked his dog Tuesday morning. "It's going to happen again."

"If I lived in any of these houses I'd worry," said another morning walker, John Whitson.

Several blocks east, however, retired veterinarian Don Bell said he wasn't worried about his new two-story house still under construction on the cliffs of Paseo del Mar.

"Oh heavens, no," he said when asked if he was worried.

Not only do new regulations require construction to be moved back from the cliffs by 60 to 80 feet, he said, but Bell was required to anchor the property and home with 42-inch-diameter pylons that go down 92 feet into the earth. At 50 feet, construction workers hit rock and had to drill through that to finish the preparation work, he said.

His home in the 1200 block of Paseo del Mar is being built on a former vacant lot. Expected to be finished in May, it is surrounded by post-war houses built much closer to the cliffs and sitting on cement slabs.

"All these houses have been here since World War II," he said.

Crane said it is not known how much dirt fell but the county is expecting more analysis to come in soon.

"We're just trying to make sure that the roadway is safe, then we'll start getting some more details on how much (of the cliffside) has slipped, to what degree it's slipping - and if it's continuing to slide," she said.

Slides are not new in the area, though much of the land movement recently has been to the east of the current problem site which is near the Royal Palms beach area.

In one of the more spectacular recent slides, the entire 18 th hole at the Ocean Trails Golf Course, then still under construction, vanished in a landslide that sent about 16 acres of the public course into the ocean in 1999.

In July, a chunk of the Sunken City cliff area in San Pedro - just under two miles to the east of the most recent slide - collapsed into the ocean, sending a large cloud of dust into the air.

Sunken City was once home to a 6-acre community owned by Harbor Area developer George Peck. In 1929, the community began sliding into the ocean south of Pacific Avenue and Shepard Street.