

Bulldozers razing slide-prone homes

Eric Carpenter, Orange County Register, 2-26-10

ANAHEIM -- The bulldozers are out and four homes in Anaheim Hills are beginning to come down.

The California Department of Transportation is demolishing the homes on Maple Tree Drive – a neighborhood prone to sliding near the junction of the 55 and 91 freeways.

The four homes have been empty and surrounded by caution tape for weeks, as crews began removing drywall, insulation and any asbestos from inside.

Barring rain, the demolition will continue Friday and each weekday from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. until all four lots are cleared – likely by April 10, Caltrans spokeswoman Tracey Lavelle said.

Caltrans now owns the slope, which runs along Santiago Boulevard, because it abuts the 55 freeway: The slope started to slide gradually in some spots after freeway-widening in the 1990s.

Six homes along Maple Tree and two on Circle Haven – the street below – have already been demolished. Relocating residents from those homes, and buying the properties, has cost the state more than \$11.8 million.

The demolition of the four most-recent homes had been set to begin earlier this month, but crews took longer than expected to remove hazards from inside, and rain also delayed the schedule.

After the demolition is complete, there will be seven homes along the west side of Maple Tree. Several of those homeowners are negotiating with Caltrans to move.

Crews were concentrating Thursday morning on a two-story house at 3937 Maple Tree Dr. By 2 p.m. most of the house had been leveled.

Nearby resident Catherine Clark came out Thursday morning to take a look.

"It's tragic," she said. "The neighborhood is being dismantled so slowly. It's like watching a train wreck in slow motion.

"It's sad for the whole community," Clark said.