

## 13 Missing in California Mudslide

Tuesday, January 11, 2005



LA CONCHITA, Calif. — Rescuers with listening devices sensitive enough to pick up a whimper or a faint tapping searched Tuesday for victims feared buried in a mudslide that sent a thunderous cascade of trees and dirt onto this seaside hamlet, killing at least five people.

The mudslide was a byproduct of a ferocious string of storms that have claimed at least 20 lives around the state since Friday. The heavy rain has left bluffs and hillsides soaked, raising the risk of more mudslides like the one that devastated La Conchita on Monday.

The dirt flowed like a waterfall, engulfing more than a dozen homes in a four-block area of the town 70 miles northwest of Los Angeles. Panicked residents ran as the tons of mud closed in on them; others ran toward the mudslide, helping some of the injured reach safety.

Fifteen homes were destroyed and 16 were damaged. Estimates of the missing had ranged as high as 27, but Roper said it was fixed at 13 after the list was refined. The missing included three children, he said.

The National Weather Service said that Los Angeles had recorded its wettest 15 consecutive days since record-keeping began in 1877, with a total of 17 inches of rain falling in the period ending Monday.

In Orange County, about 4,000 people were evacuated along a three-mile stretch of a rain-swollen creek, but the evacuation was later lifted. The creek surged 20 feet above its normal one-foot depth. It was the second time the cliffs had smashed into La Conchita, perched between the Pacific Ocean and coastal bluffs. In March 1995, nine homes were destroyed when some 600,000 tons of earth fell onto the town after a powerful storm.

Others were mad at the county, which eventually put up a \$400,000 retaining wall. The wall collapsed immediately under Monday's slide, but officials said it was intended to stop only scattered debris, not a full-scale mudslide.

1. About how many lives have been claimed per day (Friday – Tuesday) as a direct result of the mudslides in California?
2. How many homes were destroyed and/or damaged? How many more than in March 1995?
3. What is the range in estimated and fixed figures of missing persons?
4. How many years has the National Weather Service kept records of wettest 15 consecutive days?
5. In your personal opinion, was the \$400,000 retaining wall a good investment? Explain.
6. What similarities exist between South Asia's Tsunami and California's mudslides?