

Multimillion-dollar homes on the edge after landslide crumbles Orange County cliff

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Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

The three multimillion-dollar estates perched high on the edge of a Dana Point bluff boast some of the most magnificent views in Orange County: unobstructed panoramas of the crystal blue Pacific, boats moored in the harbor and, on a clear day, Santa Catalina.

But back-to-back rainstorms have prompted fresh concerns about the

homes on the aptly named Scenic Drive. The same steep cliff that falls away under the properties—giving them the illusion of being on the edge of the Earth—has withered under the atmospheric river precipitation that pounded Southern California last week. A portion of the cliff leading up to the blufftop homes washed away in the torrent.

But though their perch appears precarious, none of the homes have been evacuated or deemed too dangerous to occupy—even with more rain in the forecast, officials said.

Dr. Lewis Bruggeman, who owns the home just above the slide area, told KCAL-TV Channel 9 that his house is "not threatened and it will not be red-tagged."

"The city agrees that there's no major structural issue with the house right now," he told the station. Bruggeman did not respond to a request for comment from The Times on Tuesday.

The slide erased the greenery that just recently backed up to Bruggeman's home, a 9,700-square-foot compound estimated to be worth nearly \$16 million, leaving only [sandy soil](#) behind. On Tuesday, piles of rocks and dirt sat on the shoreline below.

The city's geotechnical engineer and a building inspector have visited the home to assess the slope failure, according to Dana Point officials.

"Engineers who already surveyed the home said there was no damage and there is no imminent threat to the structure, which is really good news," said Mayor Jamey Federico. "So quite frankly, it looks a lot scarier than it really is."

The entire property, including all the way down the cliff to the high tide line, is privately owned, he added.

Many cities in south and coastal Orange County have a long history of landslides, particularly during wet weather.

In Laguna Beach, a 1978 landslide destroyed more than 20 homes in Bluebird Canyon. The same area slid again in 2005, destroying 17 homes.

After a winter of heavy rains in 1998, several homes slid down a hillside below Via Estoril in the Niguel Summit neighborhood of Laguna Niguel. Homeowners said their properties had shown signs of moving for months before they toppled down the hill.

More recent slides in San Clemente have damaged the historic Casa Romantica and periodically interrupted train service between Orange and San Diego counties.

Last week's storm dumped 7.5 inches of rain in Dana Point. The city has received about 9.5 inches since Jan. 1, said Casey Oswant, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in San Diego.

Strong downpours triggered more than 500 mudslides in the city of Los Angeles alone and damaged more than 45 homes and buildings.

And more wet weather is on the horizon.

Based on [current models](#), Orange County is likely to see more rain from the system moving into the region this weekend than other areas such as San Diego, though forecasters say it's too early to say exactly how potent the storm will be.

"There's potential for this to be another prolonged rain event," Oswant said.

Steve Viani, a [civil engineer](#) who has experience with landslides, said tarps should be placed over the bare soil on the Dana Point property and pipes should be installed on gutters and downspouts to carry water away from the building foundation ahead of this weekend's storm.

Prolonged rain on the bare soil could further damage the slope, he said, adding that it could "give way at any time."

Visitors hiked along the adjacent Dana Point Headlands nature preserve on Tuesday morning, many completely unaware of the damage to the cliff, which is only visible from the ocean.

Billy Prescott, 56, who spent 25 years living in Dana Point before relocating to Idaho, said he'd come to expect landslides and ground movement along the coast—particularly during El Niño years.

"It's just Mother Nature," he said. "You don't always win going up against her."

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