



Montara Water & Sanitary District

Serving the Communities of Montara and Moss Beach

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April 1, 2025

Re: Private sewer connections, sump and grinder pumps in the Seal Cove Critical Geotechnical Hazards Area

Dear Property Owner,

The Montara Water and Sanitary District (MWSD) has confirmed recent increased land movement affecting roads, and our water and sewer infrastructure in the Seal Cove Critical Geotechnical Hazards Area, specifically within the San Mateo County Geotechnical Hazard Zones 1 and 2 along the coastal bluff.

Since mid-February, MWSD has responded to 10 water leaks and repaired 8 water leaks on either a District water main or individual property water connections near San Lucas Avenue and Ocean Avenue. Staff are also aware of at least five sewer issues (separations or pump failures) on private sewer assets. This is a clear indication of additional land movement.

This increased land movement may result in impacts to the sewer service to your property. **At this time, MWSD is reminding you to check and properly maintain your sewer lateral, sewer sump and grinder pumps.** Homeowners are responsible for all portions of the sewer laterals on their property and within the public right of way up to a District owned community sewer mainline. There are various privately built sewer assets in this area to address land subsidence that has occurred since the 1970's. Property owners must be vigilant in maintaining these assets to avoid failures.

Seal Cove is an area of documented geologic hazard zones and land movement. In the late 1960's, the U.S. Geological Survey slowed Seal Cove development due to active landsliding and accelerated coastal erosion. San Mateo County froze building construction and authorized a detailed geologic study of the area intended to provide guidelines for future development. The geologic study, completed in 1971, confirmed active landsliding, faulting, and seacliff erosion, and outlined requirements for development in some areas of Seal Cove. Some residential single family home development continued.

In 1980, the County once again commissioned a geologic study and confirmed continued instability and geologic hazards, including approximately 17 homes that had suffered some form of structural damage due to landslide activity. The report further identified 3 geologic hazard zones. Risk for these areas was outlined in the report, including active hazards in Zone 1:

Zone 1 Risk Assessment – UNSTABLE; Risk to development in this zone is considered to be extremely high. It is reasonable to conclude that slow progressive landsliding and seacliff retreat will continue, resulting in structural and property damage. This is especially true for structures or utilities located astride active surface breaks. Rapid catastrophic slope failure of the high, steep portion of the seacliff located west of Ocean Boulevard is a clear probability. Such an event could involve the loss of life as well as significant property damage. The feasibility of reducing the risk to acceptable levels is extremely low. No additional development should be allowed in this zone.

As part of our responsibility to maintain safe and reliable infrastructure, MWSD has been monitoring the stability of service lines in this known area of geologic hazard. Your property is located in a hazardous zone where ongoing ground movement and erosion pose a serious risk to water and sewer infrastructure. Continued operation of water or sewer service lines in these conditions could lead to:

- Pipeline failures and service interruptions
- Sinkholes or further land destabilization
- Potential environmental contamination from leaks

Given these risks to infrastructure and to MWSD staff working in a geologically active area, MWSD is evaluating the need to cap or relocate additional water mains and sewer mains outside of the geologic hazard zones. This may require property owners to relocate their service connections, maintain above ground service connections, or potentially relocate sump and sewer pumps.

If conditions worsen or if infrastructure is deemed unsafe, MWSD may be required to disconnect or modify service lines to protect public safety and the integrity of the water and sewer systems. The high likelihood of increased leaks and damage to District water and sewer pipelines is unsustainable, and contrary to our mission to protect public health and the environment.

District staff have been actively working with San Mateo County and Coastside Fire Protection District to alert them to these new leaks and land movement. We continue to work with San Mateo County to follow their guidance regarding access and building safety. We have also expressed our concern that the County seek funding opportunities which can support impacted residents.

We understand that this situation may be unsettling and raise concerns for you. We want to work closely with affected property owners to explore potential solutions, including service line relocation or reinforcement where feasible. Please feel free to contact MWSD to discuss your specific property.

For more information or to schedule a meeting with MWSD staff, please contact Clemens Heldmaier by email at clemens@mwsd.net.

We appreciate your cooperation as we navigate these challenges and prioritize community safety.