



Senator Feinstein Renews Call to Extend FEMA Relief for June 2005 Laguna Beach Landslide

- Feinstein says evidence links June landslide to winter storm events -

October 11, 2005

Washington, DC –U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) has urged the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to reconsider its decision preventing those who sustained damage from the June 2005 Laguna Beach landslide to be eligible for federal disaster relief.

Senator Feinstein has written two letters urging FEMA to extend its winter storm disaster assistance to include the public and individual damage sustained during the June landslide:

- On October 3, Senator Feinstein wrote a letter to Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff in support of the appeal submitted by the California Office of Emergency Services (OES) and the City of Laguna Beach to reopen the FEMA disaster relief for the winter storms.
- On June 20, Senator Feinstein wrote a letter jointly with then-Representative Christopher Cox in support of OES's application for federal disaster assistance.

Background

The landslides in the Bluebird Canyon neighborhood of Laguna Beach destroyed or severely damaged nearly 20 homes and caused millions of dollars of damage last June. The Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES) applied for funding through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) asking that the Laguna Beach landslide be included in the President's federal disaster declaration from December/January or February. The U.S. Geological Survey, the California Coastal Commission, the California Geological Survey and two highly reputable geotechnical firms claim that the landslides were caused by the winter storms; however, FEMA will not acknowledge this.

The initial OES application for federal assistance was denied. OES has since submitted an appeal to the denial on Thursday, September 22.

“Given that the city has met all criteria issued by FEMA, supplied ample documentation to prove its case and other federal agencies have concluded the slide was caused by the winter storms for which there is already a disaster declaration, I am perplexed why FEMA has declined to provide public and individual assistance to Laguna Beach that it so clearly deserves,” Senator Feinstein said. **“I urge you to please reconsider**

OES and the City's request to include Laguna Beach in a previously declared storm period to ensure that those impacted by the June landslide receive the assistance they need."

Following is the text of Senator Feinstein's October 3 letter to Secretary Chertoff:

October 3, 2005

The Honorable Michael Chertoff
Secretary
United States Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Chertoff:

As you know, communities throughout Southern California experienced significant damage due to near record rainfall during the winter months. You may recall that in June, I sent you a letter along with then Representative Christopher Cox requesting that you consider extending FEMA's previous disaster declarations, FEMA-1585-DR and/or FEMA-1577-DR, to provide Public and Individual Assistance to agencies and victims impacted by the Laguna Beach landslide. FEMA subsequently denied that request without explanation. Consequently, I write to support the City of Laguna Beach and the Governor's Office of Emergency Services in their appeal of this decision and urge you to reconsider. I also request that FEMA reopen the application period for FEMA-1577-DR to allow impacted residents to apply for individual assistance.

According to damage statistics from Laguna Beach officials, the slide caused \$21-22 million in private property damage as it severely damaged or destroyed 19 homes and caused \$12 to \$15 million in public damage. The City requires \$7 million of this amount for immediate repairs to stabilize the region and sustain them through the winter months.

In their original application and their appeal, the City and OES have presented compelling information which clearly links the slide to the winter storm events for which the President declared disasters. This includes geotechnical data from two highly reputable geotechnical firms along with the United States Geological Survey, the California Coastal Commission and the California Geological Survey. The City also met all the criteria set forth by the Federal Coordinating Officer, David Fukutomi. It is also worth noting that while FEMA denied Laguna Beach's request, they have granted both public and individual assistance to Culver City whose slide and data presented were very similar.

Beyond the evidence the City has submitted, the fact that other federal agencies have concluded the slide was caused by the winter storms provides additional justification for FEMA to approve their disaster assistance request. For example, despite FEMA's denial, the Small Business Administration provided loans to residents of the Laguna Beach landslides and noted in a press release that they would reopen disaster offices in the region to serve victims of "the June 1 landslide damage in the Bluebird Canyon area of Laguna Beach that was caused by the February storms." Additionally the United States Geological Survey (USGS) concluded the slide was "almost certainly related to the extremely heavy winter rains that occurred from December through February."

Given that the city has met all criteria issued by FEMA, supplied ample documentation to prove its case and other federal agencies have concluded the slide was caused by the winter storms for which there is already a disaster declaration, I am perplexed why FEMA has declined to provide public and individual assistance to Laguna Beach that it so clearly deserves.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I urge you to please reconsider OES and the City's request to include Laguna Beach in a previously declared storm period to ensure that those impacted by the June landslide receive the assistance they need.

Sincerely,

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

###