

NEWS

Sinkholes in Ventura backyards require emergency fixes



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A series of sinkholes opened in a Ventura neighborhood last month after stormwater collecting in a broken underground pipe swept away the dirt around it.

The sinkholes first showed up in backyards south of Foothill Road last year. But during recent winter storms, they crept closer to one home and threatened several other properties.

Normally, stormwater flows through the 55-year-old pipe owned by Ventura County Watershed Protection District into a nearby concrete channel. But as water escaped through holes and cracks in the corrugated metal, the dirt underneath and around it began to erode.

The county became aware of a problem last spring and planned to make repairs or replace the pipe by summer 2023. But as work started to design and fund the project, the sinkholes spread.



A broken pipe led to several sinkholes opening up in a Ventura neighborhood. *CONTRIBUTED PHOTO/VENTURA COUNTY PUBLIC WORKS*



Rain in December and early January exacerbated conditions, said Glenn Shephard, director of the county's watershed agency. By Jan. 7, a large sinkhole threatened a retaining wall on one property and another big storm was on the way. "We decided we had to do it now," Shephard said. "We can't wait."

Several sinkholes opened up in a Ventura neighborhood after a storm drain pipe failed. *CONTRIBUTED PHOTO/VENTURA COUNTY PUBLIC WORKS*

Over the last few weeks, crews filled holes with cement and installed a new 42-inch plastic pipe. The county Board of Supervisors approved paying Summer Construction, Inc., of Santa Paula, up to \$525,525 to complete the emergency work.

It took roughly 35 cubic yards of cement – the equivalent of several truckloads – to plug the sinkholes. The contractor also used a cement slurry to fill the old pipe and cavities surrounding it.

"The hole was so small originally," said Mike Narang, who owns the home just feet away from the sinkhole a few weeks ago.

Last spring, a landscaper was walking in his backyard when one of his feet fell through the surface. Back then, the hole was about knee deep but soon Narang contacted the county as the hole appeared to spread.

He later got a call saying officials were aware of the problem and designing a project to make repairs. Months passed, he said. But when the rains came, everything sped up.

"The hole was getting bigger and bigger, and it was getting close to the home," he said.

At its widest, Narang estimated five or six people could fit inside it.



County officials replaced a failing pipe with a plastic 42-inch pipe Wednesday, Feb. 8, 2023. The previous pipe led to sinkholes in the area. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO/VENTURA COUNTY PUBLIC WORKS

County finds imminent threat

After residents reported issues last May, the county inspected the underground drainpipe and recommended repairs or replacing the pipe in a July report. But the district could not get the project designed and into the budget until after rainy season, Shephard said.

"We were going to monitor it through the storm season," he said.

On the Jan. 7 site visit, officials said the sinkholes had exposed the concrete footing of a retaining wall system. They decided immediate action was required to protect the area.

Plans call for the broken pipe to be left in the ground, according to the county. Dirt will be filled in over the new pipe and a damaged fence will be replaced.

Shephard expected much of the work would be completed by later this week.

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<https://www.vcstar.com/story/news/2023/02/13/emergency-fix-underway-after-sinkholes-open-in-ventura-backyards/69875187007/>