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REGIONAL

Officials continue debris pickup, car feared buried never located

TROUTDALE (AP) - Highway crews continued the slow process of removing tons of rock, mud and debris from a heavily used two-lane road east of Portland yesterday.

The Crown Point Highway just east of Troutdale was blocked when a bluff above the Sandy River collapsed late Monday afternoon.

Two workers who had been repairing a guardrail were injured. Two other workers and three men who were fishing on the river scrambled to safety as the debris fell.

Officials initially feared a car may have been trapped in the slide, but no vehicles had been found by this morning.

"That's looking less likely all the time," said Janis Collins, spokeswoman for the Oregon Highway Division.

Bart Whalen, Multnomah County sheriff's spokesman, said authorities had located all the people believed to have been in the vicinity when the slide occurred about 4:30 p.m.

Collins said about 30,000 cubic yards of debris collapsed on the roadway just east of the Stark Street Bridge. Crews worked through the night to remove the material.

"It's going to be a long, slow process to get that cleaned up," she said. "We're expecting they'll be out there working throughout the week."

Collins said the area had been identified previously as a potential slide site and was 11th for repair on a priority list in the five-county region. The repair project, expected to cost more than \$3 million, was to have begun in a couple of years, she said.

Highway crews were unable to start digging until Portland General Electric crews arrived to shut off the power. The slide knocked power lines into the river and along the highway.

A road crew worker, Frank Johnson, 46, of Portland, was flown by helicopter to Oregon Health Sciences University Hospital. A spokeswoman said Johnson was in fair condition today with a head injury.

Another worker, Gilbert Austin, 39, of

Aloha, suffered a broken leg and was treated at Mount Hood Medical Center in Gresham.

Austin, owner of G. Clayton Austin Co. and the head of the four-member work crew, said there was a series of small rock falls throughout the day. Austin's company was contracted by the state Highway Division to paint the guard rails.

Austin said there was a "heck of a rumble" shortly before the slide started on the 150-foot cliff.

"The mountain just started crumbling on us," Austin said.

A car driven by Hope Darcy, 47, was stopped by a flagger in the westbound lane on her way home to Sandy.

"We were just sitting there," Darcy said, "and the whole mountain fell down." She said none of the cars in the line was covered in the rubble.

Darcy said the slide seemed to fall in slow motion.

She said she lived in the nearby Springdale area for many years and remembers the highway being closed near the cliff often because of fallen rubble.

"Every time I drove by, I scooted a little faster," Darcy said. "There were often landslides."

Austin said the work crew repeatedly called the Oregon Department of Transportation Highway Division to report the rock falls, which happened at 8 a.m., 11 a.m. and 3 p.m.

One of the falls brought down boulders, debris and trees, he said.

The spill was large enough to stop traffic until the road could be cleared. Austin said highway workers came to the site and swept the roadway several times.

Collins said geologist Sue D'Agnes looked over the site earlier in the day and said work could continue.

Richard Nickerson, lead lineman for Portland General Electric, said the slide knocked out power to about 200 customers near the slide and as far east as Springdale.



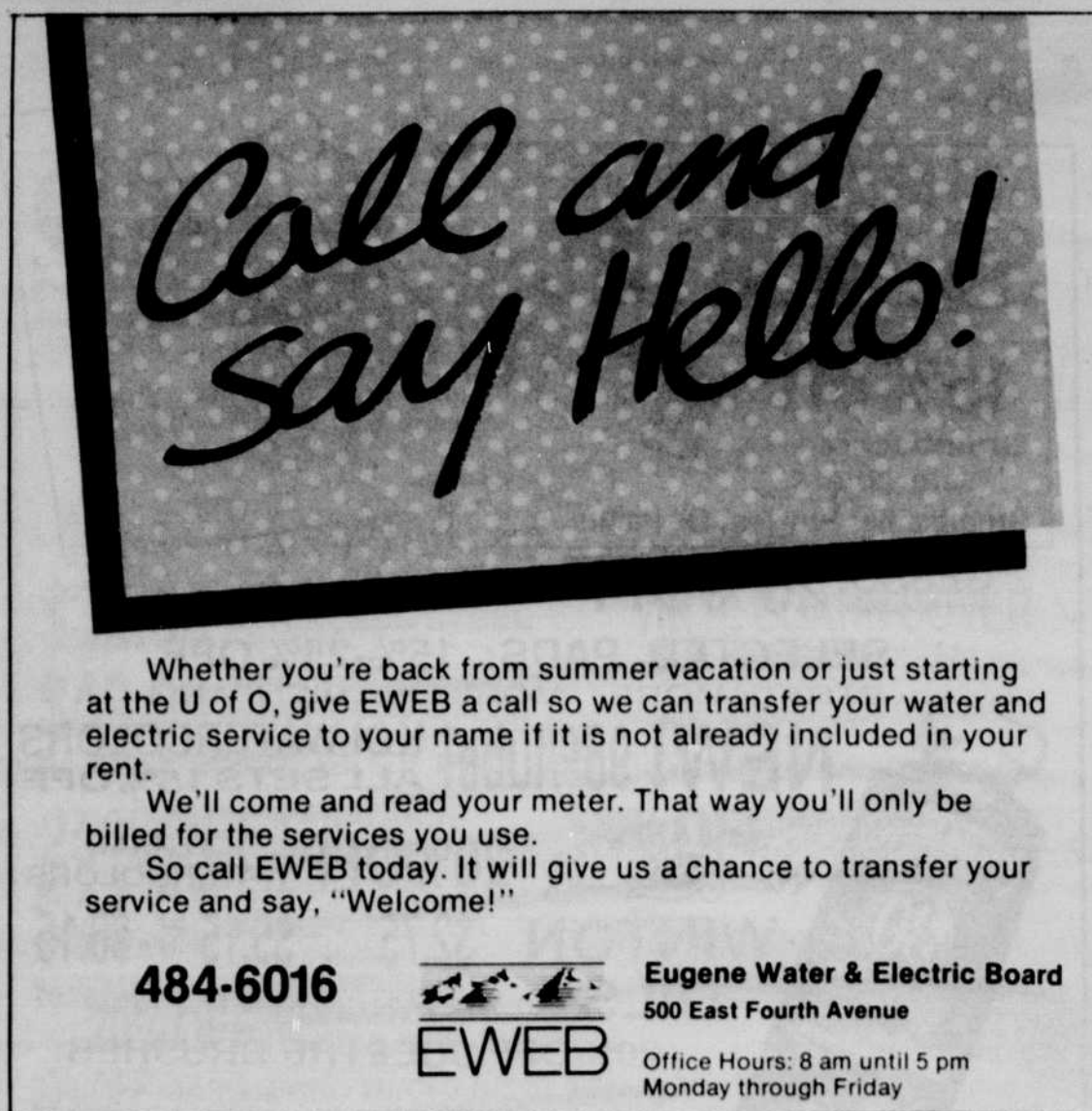
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