



Montara Water & Sanitary District

Staying Ahead of our Local Community Needs

Montara Water and Sanitary District (MWSD) works every day to deliver water, garbage and sewer services for the residents of Montara and Moss Beach. Over 6,000 residents rely on our services for their homes and businesses.

June 2026

Seal Cove Critical Geotechnical Hazards Area Frequently Asked Questions

Montara Water and Sanitary District (MWSD) staff and Board members have been concerned about increased land movement in recent winters that have affected Seal Cove homes and District infrastructure, such as sewer and water facilities.

What caused the land to move in Seal Cove?

Seal Cove has a long, well documented history of ground and soil movement. San Mateo County has completed various studies throughout the decades documenting an active landslide.

For example, in the 1960's, the County noted that: *"development in portions of the Seal Cove community was identified by the U.S. Geological Survey as being constrained by high geologic hazards due to active landsliding and accelerated coastal erosion."*

These County reports include:

- Geologic Analysis of the Seal Cove Area Report William Cotton and Associates, 1980
- Geologic Report of Seal Cove and Moss Beach Area, F. Beach Leighton and Associates, October 15, 1971

The County issued its most recent study of the area's geotechnical conditions on December 15, 2026. This study notes the annual rate of active landslide displacement has increased in the last two years. The study also noted rapid failure of the high coastal bluffs continues to be a hazard in the Seal Cove neighborhood. The report also updated the County's previous geologic analyses and provided updated maps of landslide locations and movement, along with responses to County questions.

The study can be found online at:
www.smcgov.org/planning/sealcoveinfo

What has MWSD done to address damage to its infrastructure?

Buried pipelines are affected by the same land movement that impacts homes and public roads in the Seal Cove area. The landslide movement that buckles roads can pull apart or break buried pipes. In response to land movement, the District declared an emergency on 3/27/2025. The District's mainlines in the actively moving landslide have been repaired as quickly as possible to provide uninterrupted service. Contrary to misinformation originating from certain members of the community and shared with the media, all MWSD customers in Seal Cove continue to have water and sewer service.

Why is MWSD proposing to place above ground water lines in Seal Cove?

In early 2025, to maintain water service to certain Seal Cove properties on public roads closed by San Mateo County, MWSD installed temporary above ground water service lines connecting homes to a nearby District water main. Given the likelihood of additional land movement in Seal Cove, MWSD is prepared to address further leaks and continue to provide service to all residences with above ground connections.

Above ground permanent service connections allow property owners to visually inspect water service lines and repair any leaks rapidly. Where needed, above ground mainlines can continue to provide fire protection service to affected structures and can be monitored and repaired quickly by MWSD.

How is San Mateo County involved?

San Mateo County is the land use agency for the coastal zone, and is responsible for expertise on geotechnical conditions, ground movement, and land use planning for the Seal Cove area. The County controls all development to ensure consistency with the County's coastal development and geologic hazard districts, and its Local Coastal Program (LCP) policies. This includes decisions about coastal hazards, geotechnical investigation, development standards, as well as critical public safety services – such as construction permitting (including permits for MWSD work in the streets), building inspection, as well as the construction and maintenance of public roads.

MWSD-owned infrastructure is located in public roads, which fall under County jurisdiction. The County has determined that some of the roadways in which Seal Cove infrastructure is located are unsafe to access or work in. MWSD continues to monitor the situation with the County to obtain access where it is safe to work.

What did MWSD do to address the damage to other sewer and water facilities affected by land movement?

District Code sections 3-5.1100(a) (*sewer*) and 5-4.225 (*water*) define the facilities that are the responsibility of the property owner.

After forming a special assessment district in 1983 that was primarily funded by Seal Cove residents benefitting from the Seal Cove Area Collection System Improvement Project, the District allocated surplus funds to address issues in Seal Cove, but those funds were eventually exhausted.

Following the most recent land movement in early 2025, the District has advised property owners to contact private contractors to repair these facilities, including in those situations where damaged private facilities are causing sewer effluent to escape. These obligations are applicable to all property owners within the MWSD jurisdiction.

3-5.1100 Maintenance of Side Sewers.

(a) *Maintenance.* The construction, installation, maintenance, repair and replacement of Side Sewers, Lateral Sewers, and Building Sewers shall be, and are, the responsibility, at no cost to the District, of the owner of the Parcel served thereby.

5-4.225. Ownership of Mains

Mains and appurtenances connected to the District's distribution system shall become the property of the District, and shall be operated and maintained by the District. Dedication of such mains and appurtenances to the District shall be made, in a form acceptable for recording, prior to commencement of Service through the new system. Title to Service Pipes and appurtenances thereto shall be vested in the owner of the Premises served thereby. Said Owners shall be responsible, at their sole cost and expense, for the maintenance, repair and replacement of such Service Pipes.

Who should I contact for assistance?

Please contact MWSD at 650-728-3545 for emergencies, or send us an email at info@mwsd.net for non-urgent inquiries.

