

### Tragedy Strikes Washington: The Oso Mudslide

A massive, mile-wide mudslide in Snohomish County, Wash., devastated homes and lives, leaving at least 14 people confirmed dead and 176 people still missing. The slide near the hamlet of Oso descended from above the North Fork of the Stillaguamish River, careening over the river, and rushing through homes and onto Highway 530 at about 11 a.m. on March 22. An enormous debris and mud field – 20 feet deep or more in places – still blankets much of the surrounding area and homes. The magnitude of this disaster is not yet fully known, as the National Guard and FEMA continue search efforts for those still missing. Our thoughts and prayers go out to those injured or missing and their families and friends.

Although investigative efforts are in their very early stages, some accounts of those familiar with the area suggest it had a long history of mudslides dating back more than 60 years. Prior slides apparently hit the same area in 1949, 1951, 1967 and 2006. Indeed, the disaster may have been long predicted, and repeated warnings may have made this disaster eminently foreseeable. Nonetheless, homebuilding was permitted after a large slide that occurred in this location in 2006.

The rescue efforts are ongoing. After rescue operations are completed and the massive debris pile begins to be cleared away, the investigation is likely to shift focus to third-party liability for this tragic disaster. There is an ongoing investigation regarding the circumstances under which governmental entities permitted home construction to occur in this area after the 2006 slide.

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