

## Letters to the Editor

# Where to point fingers

In Wednesday's paper, the coverage of the unfortunate loss of life at Johnsons Landing begs the question: who's to blame?

A comment made by a regional district employee shortly after the slide occurred summed things up and highlighted at least who is partly to blame, as far as I'm concerned. The employee indicated that they had not known that Johnsons Landing was at risk of this sort of event because such an event had never occurred before. However, they indicated that they had not had any geological hazard mapping done.

The lack of knowledge regarding potential geological hazards is akin to the ostrich sticking its head in the ground and hoping nothing happens.

It is very unfortunate that communities (including Nelson) and regional districts in the Kootenay region do not recognize the benefits of geological hazard mapping.

This is not the case in other regional districts around the province — Squamish, Okanagan and Vancouver Island, to name a few. Many have undertaken reconnaissance level hazard mapping in an effort to avoid developing in high risk areas. You may recall the slide that occurred in North Vancouver a few years ago that also prompted that community to undertake

geological hazards mapping.

In 1998, I was employed by the Ministry of Forests to undertake geological hazards mapping in the Slocan Valley area along the slopes of Perry Ridge. That project was supposed to be a partnership project with the regional district. At the start of the project the regional district

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had indicated that the Perry Ridge mapping project was to be the first part of a more extensive geological hazards mapping project in the Slocan Valley. Strangely, the regional district pulled out of supporting the project even before the first phase was completed and decided not to do any further mapping.

However, the fact that they never financially supported the project has not stopped them from using the mapping and I believe they still have a copy of the map and we still receive phone calls from homeowners regarding the hazard mapping.

In my expert opinion it is the lack of knowledge that is to blame here. Mandy Bath, the woman interviewed

about Gar Creek in last Wednesday's paper, realized in hindsight that there were clues that something was happening the night before the slide occurred, but like the tsunami victims who all rushed down to the beach when the ocean receded, she had no idea what the signs were saying. The fact that she was up at night looking at a mud slurry with flashlight in hand really supports my concern about the lack of knowledge in this area regarding geological hazards.

Right here in Nelson there are several potential debris flood and debris flow creeks draining through town without adequately sized culverts that are, in my opinion, loaded guns with unsuspecting residents living beside them.

So if anyone is to blame it is the regional district for not bothering to undertake hazard mapping and to educate residents of the Kootenay region about risks of such events in this area.

Certainly no one should be pointing fingers at the response time of search and rescue who, without a doubt, put themselves at risk to search for victims. It is very sad, but those victims were dead within seconds of that debris flow barreling down on their houses.

**Kim Green  
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