

2 Die in Guatemala City Sinkhole

Hundreds Forced From Homes

By JUAN CARLOS LLORCA
Associated Press

GUATEMALA CITY, Feb. 23 — A 330-foot-deep sinkhole killed two teenage siblings when it swallowed about a dozen homes early Friday and forced the evacuation of nearly 1,000 people in a crowded Guatemala City neighborhood.

Officials blamed the sinkhole on recent rains and flow from a ruptured underground sewage main. The bodies were found near the enormous fissure, floating in a river of sewage.

From the pit came foul odors, loud noises and tremors that shook the surrounding ground. A rush of water could be heard, and authorities feared the pit could widen or others open up.

Edward Ramirez, 26, said he and other residents had been hearing noises and feeling tremors for about a month before the ground opened, waking many before dawn in the impoverished neighborhood.

"People were shouting, 'The electric posts are falling down!'" said Ramirez, who lives 50 yards from the hole. "We are going to a friend's house now. There's no way we'll stay here."

Maria Rivas said she was in her home when the sinkhole opened.

"I started to hear booming, and I felt the earth shaking, and then I realized that the homes had collapsed" into the sinkhole, she said.

Throughout the day, police helped residents move out. Some officers carried refrigerators and TV sets on their shoulders, while others pushed sofas on makeshift carts.

The dead were identified as Irma and David Soyos, said emergency services spokesman Juan Carlos Bolanos. Their father, Domingo, was still missing, according to disaster coordinator Hugo Hernandez.

Rescue operations were on hold until a firefighter,



CARLOS QUINTE — REUTERS

One of the evacuating residents carries his stove after a 330-foot-deep sinkhole consumed about a dozen homes.

suspended from a cable, could shoot video and photos of the hole and officials could use them to decide how to proceed. From the air, the sinkhole looked like a bottomless, black pit amid concrete streets, tin-roofed shacks and a couple of larger buildings.

Security officials protected the site from possible looters and kept onlookers away.

Cristobal Colon, a spokesman for the municipal water authority, said the sewage main ruptured after becoming clogged. He said that the city had been aware of the blockage and that the army had been considering a controlled explosion to clear the pipe, which carries both rainwater and sewage for much of the capital.

Antonio Puentes, 50, said he plans to abandon the run-down neighborhood he has called home for 15 years.

"Last night, a friend had to take my handicapped wife out on a motorcycle," he said. "Now I'm leaving for good, never to come back."

Sinkhole in Guatemala City Kills Two Teens, Swallows Homes



The 330-foot-deep sinkhole took about a dozen homes when it opened before dawn yesterday. "I started to hear booming, and I felt shaking," one resident recalled. Officials blamed the sinkhole on recent rains and flow from a ruptured underground sewage main. S

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CARLOS DUARTE — AP

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