

‘Significant risk’: Authorities urge ‘utmost caution’ along, below cracking Del Mar bluffs



A man passes a section of coastal bluff which collapsed in Del Mar Sunday morning, Feb. 28. (Bill Wechter)

Officials say beachgoers should stay at least 50 feet away from the top, bottom of Del Mar bluffs

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DEL MAR —

Authorities on Friday, March 5, urged beachgoers to use “utmost caution” in Del Mar and portions of Torrey Pines State Beach, and to avoid the tops of the bluffs altogether, after finding cracks in the cliffs that “pose a significant risk.”

A [bluff collapse Sunday](#) morning, Feb. 28, just south of Fourth Street, near Del Mar's border with Torrey Pines State Beach, occurred [within 35 feet of a portion of railroad tracks](#), prompting emergency repairs, according to the North County Transit District.

"Geotechnical experts have determined that train service can be operated safely at a reduced speed," officials from the transit district and the San Diego Association of Governments said in a statement Friday, March 5. "However, another bluff failure is possible due to cracks observed at the top of the bluffs and pose a significant risk to beachgoers."

Officials said the public should not come within 50 feet of the Del Mar bluffs or the beach below, and they said law enforcement will be present along the tops of the bluffs near the Sunday, Feb. 28, collapse site "to educate the public about the inherent risks."

"Being caught in a bluff collapse can cause serious injury or death," said the joint statement from NCTD, SANDAG and city of Del Mar.

Drone video shot after the Sunday, Feb. 28, collapse showed a wide section of the cliff sheared off from the railroad level to the beach, leaving a pile of sandstone and rubble at the high-tide line.

Sheriff's deputies cordoned off the beach near the collapse, and rescue dogs were brought in to search for anyone buried in the rubble. Nothing was found, and there were no reports of anyone injured or missing.

[SANDAG has been working with NCTD](#) and other agencies for decades to [stabilize the 1.7 miles of track on the Del Mar bluffs](#), where the cliffs are increasingly threatened by coastal erosion.



A Surfliner train by Amtrak travels along the collapsing bluffs in Del Mar in 2019. (John Gibbins/The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Studies show the bluffs disappear at the average rate of six inches per year. However, episodic events are the greatest threat, in which large sections break off, sometimes in perfect weather with no warning. [Three women in a family](#) sitting at Grandview Beach in Encinitas were [killed by a collapse in August 2019](#).

Stormwater runoff during the heavy rains of Thanksgiving week in 2019 caused a [failure that threatened the tracks and delayed trains](#) until repairs could be completed a month later in a section just north of the Sunday, Feb. 28, collapse.

— *Alex Riggins is a reporter for The San Diego Union-Tribune*

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