

## Water damage



Menlo Park firefighter Ben Marra (left) and engineer George Miller survey a water tank that burst Wednesday afternoon in East Palo Alto, spilling 100,000 gallons. Details, B-1.

MELISSA MARCIANO



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Firefighter Harold Schapelhouman of the Menlo Park Fire Protection District tries to keep his balance amid

the rubble of what, just hours earlier, was a water tank in East Palo Alto.

## Water tank bursts, unleashing torrent

CAROLYNE ZINKO / STAFF  
EAST PALO ALTO

The group of children playing school on Garden and Addison streets Wednesday afternoon might just as well have been playing Noah's Ark.

A 100,000-gallon water tank exploded around 1:30 p.m., sending a miniature tidal wave through the streets that caused bystanders to run for cover and inspired earthquake panic in others.

Metal staves on the 34-year-old tank

owned by the Palo Alto Park Mutual Water Co. burst after workers began repairs on the earthquake-damaged container Wednesday morning, said Battalion Chief Peter Chanteloup of the Menlo Park Fire Protection District.

Workers said they tightened the staves and began to refill the tank when the bolts apparently stripped from the pressure and gave way.

The force of the explosion leveled the tank, which was 20 feet high and 30 feet in diameter.

Splintered 4-by-10 boards flew into the air, landing in nearby yards and pieces of pipe ended up wrapped around trees like horseshoes.

What remained of the tank and a pump house next to it looked like a pile of pick up sticks.

"It looked like a tidal wave coming toward them," said Lourdes Ibarra, 14, who interpreted for a group of Spanish-

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# TANK

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speaking children who were playing house in the street.

Water flowed 1½ feet deep in the street through the driveway and into the back yard of Refugio Rodriguez, 55.

"She said it's been leaking since yesterday. It (the tank) just popped and she saw water

coming toward her house. She screamed and the house moved. She thought it was an earthquake," Ibarra said on behalf of Rodriguez.

Palo Alto Park Mutual Water Co. Treasurer Katherine Loudd, who was inside the office near the tank, said she could hear the bolts popping on the staves and left the office to turn the pump off when the tank burst.

"Thirty seconds more and I would have been halfway there (to the tank)," she said. As she turned and ran inside to escape the water, a piece of wood pierced the door behind her.

"It splashed up against the wall of the building like in a movie," she said. "I wasn't sure if any was going to come into the building, but none did."

Service to the water district's 600 customers was not disrupted, Loudd said.

She estimated a new tank would cost \$90,000 and money would have to come from applications previously made to the Federal Emergency Management Agency after the Oct. 17 earthquake.