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Mayor raps city eng'r, contractor on fatal landslide

BAGUIO CITY — Mayor Ernesto H. Bueno last week charged that personnel from the city engineer's office and the contractors concerned should have noticed the dan-

ger signs preceding the collapse of a newly built rip rap stonewall on Bonifacio street which killed three people the other week.

At a meeting of con-

tractors and city engineer's office representatives, he said he saw none of their men in the field when he made an inspection of the projects during the typhoon.

The day before the tragedy, sections of the newly built stonewall had already collapsed.

Bueno disclosed his preliminary findings last week indicating that the landslide which took three lives and injured two others may have been caused by the heavy typhoon rains seeping into an earth fault below the road's surface. However, members of the investigating committee disagreed with these initial findings.

The mayor said that the drainage along the newly constructed road was not working at the time of the storm, and that the drainage of General Luna street was closed by the construction

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Mayor raps . . .

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of Saint Louis University
(SLU) boys' high school.

In a separate interview, city engineer David Borja confirmed that an abnormally large volume of water was flowing along the newly concreted road surface at the time because the water could not enter the drainage pipes through the existing openings which are built higher than the road surface to allow for the construction of sidewalks.

Borja also confirmed that the SLU construction had sealed off the drainage of General Luna street, increasing the flow of water toward Bonifacio street.

The mayor said, however, that from the appearance of the portion which fell toward the house, there may have been a natural fault existing below the road surface at that point, because instead of a cascade of earth there appears to be sheared-off portoin.

The mayor said that he is verifying whether the contractor sealed the gaps between the cement gutter and road were sealed with asphalt fitter.

Rainwater flowing on the road surface may have seeped into the natural fault and caused the landslide, he said.

However, dean Salvador Navarette of the University of Baguio (UB) engineering department did not agree with the mayor's and city engineer's saying "that is definitely not our findings" referring to the investigation being conducted by himself and engineering department heads of Saint Louis University (SLU) and Baguio Colleges Foundation (BCF). It was gathered that extensive tests have to be made before the cause of the tragedy can be pinpointed

Navarette said their committee is planning to bring in experts from the Bureau of Mines and Geo-Sciences (BMGS) to aid in their investigation which is still ongoing.

The committee chaired by kagawad Bert Floresca also includes kagawads Daniel Milo, Edilberto Tenefrancia, Rose Tabora and city engineer David Borja as well as the three engineering department deans.

Observers last week pointed at existing culverts in the old stonewall over which the new stonewall was built, saying that outflow from these culverts may have loosened the earthfill between the two walls, causing the landslide.

Still others pointed out that there was very little cement, if any, placed between the stones of the wall. A little cement was spread on the outside face of the wall. The insufficient cement reportedly rendered the wall weak in the first place. This observation was supported by the fact that the wall did not collapse in large sections, but separated into loose stones.

It was also observed that rocks in the remaining portion of the wall can be shaken loose by hand.

Knowledgeable sources say there are rampant violations of design specifications in many similar privately contracted city projects.

As of press time, it was not known whether the accident victims or their next of kin are going to file suit against the city or the contractors for the accident.

It was learned that Kane construction, contractor of the ill-fated project, subcontracted the riprapping of the wall to another firm. However, the city engineer said the city will still hold Kane construction responsible for the project.