

Beat: News

Presumed death toll reaches 28 a week after Washington landslide

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USPA News - Rescue workers searching for victims at what remains of a small community in Washington state observed a moment of silence on Saturday, marking a week since the devastating landslide that is believed to have killed at least 28 people and left nearly two dozen others missing. The moment of silence at 10:37 a.m. local time on Saturday was observed at both the site of the tragedy and across the state.

"I know that every Washingtonian holds in their heart the people of the Stillaguamish Valley and we all wish we could ease their pain," said Washington Governor Jay Inslee. Heavy rain hampered Saturday's efforts of search crews which continue working in the debris field, though they were able to locate and recover the remains of one additional victim, bringing the presumed death toll to 28. One other victim was formally identified by the Snohomish County Medical Examiner's Office on Saturday, putting the confirmed death toll at 18. But although the death toll has continued to rise over the past week, 60 of the 90 people who had been reported as missing were confirmed to have not been caught in the landslide. A total of 30 people remained missing on Sunday, but with 10 additional bodies located at the scene, the actual number is likely to be about 20. Periods of extremely heavy rain saturated the site over the weekend, causing ponds to form in some of the search areas. "Crews had to de-water those sites in order to continue searching. Engineers are also posting a lookout in the field to watch for any material sloughing off the landslide area," a county spokesperson said. Despite the heavy rain, workers were able to open an emergency service road that connects the east and west sides of the slide, though it will remain off-limits to the general public. "This is a welcome asset for crews and helps improve communication between teams working the debris field," the spokesperson said. The weather in the area is expected to improve Monday and Tuesday. The devastating landslide happened at about 10:37 a.m. local time on March 22 and struck an area of State Route 530 in Oso, between Arlington and Darrington, in Snohomish County. The slide wiped out a small community with dozens of homes, but no survivors have been found since the day of the landslide. U.S. President Barack Obama signed an emergency declaration for Washington state on Monday and ordered federal aid to supplement state and local response efforts in the affected area. Obama later approved a request for an amended federal emergency declaration, allowing local government agencies and non-profits to recover costs of emergency protective measures, emergency response, and debris removal from the federal government.

Article online:

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