

# Sinkhole still growing

**United Press International**  
KERMIT — A 300-square-foot chunk of earth toppled off the southwestern edge of a giant sinkhole Monday in the most dramatic activity at the site since daily cave-ins subsided late last week. Authorities could only watch the chasm grow and keep out the curious.

Weekend rains apparently were responsible for the hole's recent gains.

Winkler County Deputy Jan Moore said late Sunday a slice of earth 50 feet long and 5 feet wide fell into the murky oilwater mixture at the bottom of the pit.

"And just now (deputy Rick Davis) radioed in that another 60-foot-long and about 5- to 6-foot-wide chunk went off the west side again. This happened south of what happened last night," she said.

"We had quite a bit of rain Sunday — somewhere between 1 and 2 inches. I was out there yesterday, and I felt like I was in a boat," Moore said.

She said water settled in the cracks surrounding the crater that is estimated to be about 150 to 200 yards in diameter.

A geologist at the site, she said, had predicted the sinkhole might begin to grow again because of the rainfall.

Sightseers continued to arrive at the site during the weekend, despite the presence of "no trespassing" signs, barricades and deputies.

Some drove 150 miles or more from Lubbock and

El Paso, Moore said.

"I didn't believe them. They'd show me their driver's licenses to prove where they were from. They just came from everywhere to see it, and I had to tell them they just couldn't," she said.

Deputies arrested three Odessa men at the site Sunday, and the men, charged with public intoxication and trespassing, remained in jail Monday.

The gaping crater, located in a pasture and oil field four miles south of town, was first reported a week ago as a 3-foot-wide crack in the earth.

In less than 36 hours, a yawning cavity had formed at the site and cracks extended beyond it for 200 yards, threatening a battery of oil storage tanks some 400 yards away.

Despite speculation as to its size, no official measurement has been made, Moore said.

"I have begged people to do that. No one will do it. I guess they're waiting for it to stabilize," she said.

Oilfield pipeline and power lines threatened by the crater were rerouted last week and Shell Oil Co. began emptying some of the 135,000-barrel capacity tanks at the tank farm. By week's end, however, the cave-ins were smaller and less frequent.

"Now, the water's settled and (the earth's) gotten soft all the way through," Moore said Monday, "so I guess it has accelerated once again."

Geologists theorize the mysterious sinkhole may have occurred when water dissolved underground salt beds.

# Relatives fight claim by medical center

# Fights continue over Hughes will

**United Press International**  
CARSON CITY, Nev. — An attorney for the relatives of the late Howard Hughes told the Nevada Supreme Court Monday the billionaire never left any will giving his estate to the non-profit Howard Hughes Medical Institute.

Peter Echeverria argued that every girl friend, attorney and acquaintance of Hughes was questioned but the mystery will never appeared. He urged the court to uphold a lower ruling against permitting a trial on whether the medical institute was entitled to the money.

But Joseph Hassett, attorney for the medical center headquartered in Miami, said there was ample evidence to show a will existed and a jury should ultimately decide the question.

The court took the arguments under study in the latest battle over the estate of Hughes, who died in 1976 on a flight from Mexico to Houston. Most of Hughes' relatives live in Texas and if no will is found, then they probably would get the fortune.

One document — the "Mormon Will" has already been declared a fake after a hearing in district court. And the medical institute, formed in

1953, seeks to prove that the will making it the sole beneficiary was either lost or destroyed.

Hassett says that a Dr. Jack Pettit read the will and Hughes talked about it before his death.

The medical institute lost a pre-trial motion when District Judge Charles Thompson of Las Vegas granted a summary judgment in favor of the estate of Annette Gano Lummis, one of the relatives of Hughes. She has died since the litigation started over the Hughes will.

Nevada law requires testimony from two credible witnesses to establish that a will actually existed before it might have been lost or stolen. Hassett argued Dr. Pettit was one and that the declarations of Hughes should be allowed to be substituted for a live witness.

But acting Chief Justice Gordon Thompson said he didn't think the law contemplated a dead person's testimony being substituted for a live witness. And Justice Cameron Batjer pointed out the law requires these two witnesses to sign their statements, which would be impossible in the case of Hughes.

Hassett told the court however the evidence code of the state does allow Hughes' statements to be admitted into court. He said there should be a full blown trial so the full facts can be shown.

However, Echeverria argued the medical institute hasn't satisfied the law by producing two live witnesses. He said the "most monumental will search in the history of man" was conducted and no document was ever found.

He said there has never been any evidence shown where and when the will was written, who witnessed it and where it was filed. He said the probate laws of Nevada must be enforced to ensure no fraud is pulled in dealings involving wills.

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# Blown out oil rig inspected

**United Press International**  
NEW ORLEANS — Oil company officials Monday inspected a charred and sagging Gulf of Mexico oil rig gutted by fire that sent flames up to 200 feet in the air.

The fire erupted Sunday and forced 42 workers to scramble for their lives. All crew members escaped the rig but seven suffered minor injuries.

"We are in the process of assessing damages, trying to make some plans so we can start recovery," said Wes Westgaard, a spokesman for the rig's owner, Marathon Oil Co.

The upper portion of the multi-level platform was knocked off balance by the force of the blast.

"We don't think it could fall over, but we will have a derrick barge on location today and hope we will be

able to cure anything that might be a problem as far as toppling," he said.

The fire burned for more than six hours after starting without warning.

Three men were receiving treatment at a hospital.

"I looked up and there were flames," said Sid Stewart, 55, of Carthage, one of those admitted to Lake Charles (La.) Memorial Hospital. "You never expect anything like that. You expect it not to happen."

Stewart, who was "feeling real good" but a little sore, heard a fire alarm, took off his life preserver, threw it into the water and jumped in after it.

The platform held 24 oil and gas wells, including one that had just been completed. The Coast Guard said only minor pollution occurred.

Several workers jumped 45 feet

from the platform into the Gulf and swam for more than five minutes until they were picked up.

At one point, witnesses said, flames shot 200 feet into the air.

Reporters flying over the area at dusk saw three workboats spraying streams of water on the platform. Thick black smoke billowed from the deck and soot flakes coated the water for miles.

Two helicopters crisscrossed the area, searching for possible oil slicks from the damaged rig.

A charred skeleton remained of the crew's quarters on the 75-foot by 117-foot rig.

The platform and drilling rig was located in 220 feet of water about 200 miles southwest of New Orleans, in East Cameron Block 321. It was operated by Marathon Oil Co. and had been in the area for about five years.

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# It's a grand ole year for C&W as country tops pop in sales

**United Press International**  
NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Break out the banjos and fiddles — country music sales have surpassed pop music and pulled into second place behind rock 'n' roll for the first time in history.

While record company executives in the music hubs of New York and Los Angeles were worrying about losing their jobs because of a sales slump this year, officials in Nashville were clicking champagne glasses.

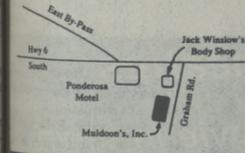
Figures released Thursday by the

New Jersey-based National Association of Recording Merchandisers show country not only enjoyed gross sales of \$437 million last year — a \$10 million jump over 1978 — but outstripped pop, disco and soul record sales.

The increase in country music sales was in sharp contrast to a generally gloomy picture of the record industry in 1979. Gross sales dropped by more than \$505 million, nearly 12 percent, to \$3.7 billion from 1978 to 1979.

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