

**Gary Christenson - Salt Lake Tribune: Slippery slope: Landslide areas are wrong places to build homes**

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**Date:** 5/4/2006 10:11 AM  
**Subject:** Salt Lake Tribune: Slippery slope: Landslide areas are wrong places to build homes

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## **Slippery slope: Landslide areas are wrong places to build homes**

Salt Lake Tribune

The people at Utah Geological Survey will tell you Utah is landslide country, and they should know. They would also warn against building homes on soil that might move - if anyone asked.

Unfortunately, too few builders and government officials do.

The UGS has gathered reams of data, reports and maps detailing where the earth is likely to slip. During wet springs like this one, UGS geologists are busy monitoring dozens of landslides. More than 85 were documented last year, and even more are moving this spring.

But, all that knowledge doesn't prevent irresponsible developers from building homes near or right on top of unstable land and doesn't deter people from buying them. Then, when mud and rocks tumble into those homes or the earth moves from beneath them, the homeowners are bewildered and angry, and rightly so.

Morgan County is a sad example of greedy developers and local officials who are, if not legally, at least ethically deficient. Homes were built in an area of five active landslides, and one home, so far, has been destroyed. Even after the county engineer warned the planning board of the potential danger, the developer was allowed to build.

Unbelievably, the developer is also a member of the County Council and denies responsibility for the homeowners' loss.

Utah is a "buyer beware" state. Although county planning offices have the UGS data and maps on file and developers have access to them, unless a savvy home buyer asks to see them, they usually stay on the shelf. Few local governments require disclosure.

Most county and city governments either don't have ordinances that restrict building on unstable land or they don't enforce them. Utah is in the midst of a building boom, and city and county officials are busy just reviewing building-permit applications and conducting basic inspections.

To make matters worse, the construction frenzy is spreading farther into the foothills where slides are more prevalent. There is money to be made in those foothills, and developers have political clout.

*Caveat emptor*, "let the buyer beware," is good advice for home buyers, but local officials have a duty to restrict building on unstable land, and developers have an ethical responsibility to avoid building on it.