



SNAPPING HOLE—Crewmen for a Moranco Drilling Co. rig secured extra guy wires to a recently placed rig south of Lakewood Saturday morning in an effort to prevent the powered structure from falling further into a massive sinkhole that opened beneath the rig Friday afternoon. Efforts were to

be made to fill the hole with dirt in order that the rig can be skidded away from the dangerous location. The rig, which was erected in the middle of an alfalfa field, had drilled on 386 feet when its foundation gave way.

(Daily Press Photo)

Near Lakewood Community

Sink Hole Threatens Drilling Rig

A million dollar drilling rig owned by Moranco Drilling Co. of Hobbs was threatened late Friday when a large sink hole caved in beneath the rig's foundation, nearly toppling the massive structure's tower.

Saturday morning, drilling crews hurried to connect extra guy wires to the heavy tower and platform in an effort to prevent it from falling into the underground cavity.

Moranco driller Gale Irvin of Hobbs told the Daily Press that the rig had drilled approximately 386 feet deep by about 4:30 p.m. Friday when he felt the structure shake. Irvin said he knew something happened, and when a member of his crew was sent below the rig's floor, he found the sink hole opening up. The rig was shut down immediately.

Saturday morning, the drilling end of the

rig had tilted downward about six inches.

The Moranco No. 5 rig was erected Monday on the L.T. Lewis estate located about 1.5 miles south of the Lakewood community.

Tool pusher R.M. Smith of Hobbs said the rig was to be stabilized with guy wires Saturday and left alone until earth moving machinery could attempt to fill the sink hole. An oil company spokesman said crews would probably attempt to skid the rig away from the sink hole during the next two or three days.

"I wouldn't have given a plug nickel for this rig last night," one company official said Saturday. "We were standing up near the rig about 10 o'clock last night and all of a sudden we heard a big chunk of dirt fall off in the

water. There's still some water down in the hole, and I figured for sure the rig would be gone this morning."

Both Irvin and Smith said they had experienced problems with the "cellar," a wooden structure under the rig floor through which the drilling casing passes, caving in on other wells, "but this is the first time we've ever seen one like this."

The sink hole opening extended beyond the width of the rig's foundation (approximately 25 feet) and appeared to be 20-25 feet deep.

A Lakewood area resident, who was watching the rig rescue efforts Saturday morning, said, "And this is where they're going to build the Brantley Dam reservoir to hold all that water."