



Sinkhole nearly swallows swingset

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A 10-foot-deep, eight-foot-wide sinkhole opened up in the backyard of a Wesley Chapel family on Monday while their two young children played on a swingset.

Wesley Chapel, Florida - A Wesley Chapel family got an unexpected surprise on Monday while their two young children played on their swingset.

4-year-old Alana Harely and her 7-year-old brother Joshua literally watched the earth open up before them just a few feet away from their swings.

The kids immediately ran inside to tell their father and older brother Chris.

"We told him, 'There's a big hole out there,'" said Alana.

"When my husband came out, the ground was still falling, he could hear it dropping inside," said Harley's mother Jessica.

Chris told 10 Connects what he heard, "It was kind of like falling dirt, like it was pounding on the ground. I was pretty stunned."

Harley says an engineer estimates the sink hole to be 10 feet wide and eight feet deep.

The hole may still be growing. Caution tape, put up by firefighters, now surrounds the hole, along with the Harley's swingset and Alana's beloved playhouse.

Jessica Harely says the hole will be filled with sand as a temporary fix while they get the rest of their property tested for other sinkholes.

"This is going to be a process, at least a few months," explained Harley. It may also be that long until the kids get to play in their backyard again.

Alana is not pleased.

"We're just sad because we just want to play because our backyard is good and we like to play in it," the 4-year-old said.

The Harley's say insurance should cover the rest of the costs to permanently fix the hole and repair small cracks to their home, which they are now noticing.

Their neighbors will likely have to get their properties checked too.

Ed Zisman, a geotechnical services manager with ATC tells 10 Connects sink holes are common in Pasco County and there's not much the family could have done to prevent it.

The drought could have been a factor.

"When there's a drought, the soil becomes heavier because it's no longer buoyant," explained Zisman.

Zisman says some of the signs you should be on the look out for are small cracks on your home, unusual noises coming from your home and the ground, and the new indentations appearing in your yard.

If you see the signs, it may be a good time to call an engineer to conduct a preliminary evaluation of your property to find out what's going on below the surface.

Sink holes usually occur when the limestone in the ground is slowly eaten away by rain, creating cavities below the surface. When the soil becomes too heavy, it collapses.

Zisman says sink holes are common in the Pasco County area.

The Harley family is hoping others will learn from their experience, encouraging people to learn more about sink holes.

Right now though, the family is waiting for further tests of their property and still don't know what lies beneath.

"We're sitting ducks," said Harely.

[Click here](#) to read a brochure from the Southwest Florida Water Management District regarding sinkholes.

Laura Kadechka, 10 Connects News