

Wreck Beach battle over towers heats up

13,000 plus sign a petition against new residences.

BY FRANK LUBA

The GVRD's plan to test the height of the proposed peek-a-boo towers at the university of BC crashed to the ground yesterday.

It wanted to send up a blimp to gauge how much of the towers could be seen from the nudist beach below – and what could be seen from the towers – but UBC said no.

UBC spokesman Scott McRae said the test was cancelled because the location is a construction site.

"We're not trying to hide anything," said McRae.

UBC has done its own balloon test, but the results differed from tests done by the Wreck Beach Conservation Society, which is why the GVRD decided to do its own test.

The beach is part of the Greater Vancouver Regional District's Pacific Spirit Park.

UBC owns the land on which the towers, to house 2,000 students, are being built.

Wreck Beach supporters say they will present a petition signed by more than 1,000 people opposed to the towers to the GVRD board today.

James Loewen of the Wreck Beach group said he's not really concerned about students in the towers looking down on the beach.

"Our concern is looking up at the towers," he said.

Another problem for Loewen is the erosion of the sandstone cliffs above Wreck Beach because of the construction, the first phase of which is to be completed next year. "That's a huge issue," said Loewen.

"That land has been seriously degraded by heavy building."

Beachgoer Lara Doucette, 27, called the new student residences "a horrible thing."

Said Julian Demaerschalk, 60, a former UBC forestry professor: "You take vegetation away to replace it with buildings; the erosion right away is negatively affected."

Even though Catriona Remmocker, 20, is trying to get into residence at UBC, she'd prefer the towers were built elsewhere.

"It's destroying a place in the city that is really unique to Vancouver," said Remmocker outside the Student Union Building.

"When you're down on Wreck Beach you can't see any of the city and that's really special about it. That's why people feel so secure down there. If you're seeing this towering building over it, it's just going to ruin the atmosphere."