

## County, private nonprofit partner to provide water to dry well owners

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Stanislaus County residents with dry wells may soon receive relief after the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday proclaimed the existence of a local emergency due to a multi-year drought and committed to provide water to those whose wells have gone dry through the Temporary Water Assistance Program.

“With over 50 dry wells being reported in Stanislaus County, staff sought to find a program that would provide a temporary option while a long-term solution is being reached,” said Stanislaus County Fire Warden and Assistant Director Emergency Services Dale Skiles.

“In developing a temporary solution for homeowners, our goals have been to provide something that is responsive to the needs and can be quickly deployed,” continued Skiles.

The development of TWA began approximately a month and a half ago when Supervisor William O’Brien initially pushed his fellow supervisors to provide some form of assistance to homeowners without water.

“This really came about around 45 days ago when we were sitting around a table saying, ‘Okay, what happens if you go home tonight and you turn on the tap and there’s no water?’” said O’Brien. “Because that’s what Supervisor Chiesa and my residents are facing. We have most of the dry wells in the county.”

O’Brien’s recommendation was fully accepted by Supervisor Vito Chiesa, who agreed that his and O’Brien’s districts were the ones that seemed to have the most issues with water reliability in the county.

“This is exactly where we need to be,” said Chiesa. “We finally have something for folks to fall back on because there was nothing for the longest time.”

Due to a high demand for well drilling services, residents and business owners have had to experience an average wait of six to nine months for a new or deeper well to be completed.

“This program is just what we need to at least get homeowners by until they can get a new well drilled,” said Supervisor Jim De Martini.

Program costs will be funded through the California Disaster Assistance Act, which authorizes the Director of the California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services to provide funds to support essential community services and relief efforts.

CDA also provides reimbursement of local government costs associated with certain emergency activities that are carried out in response to a state of emergency proclaimed by the Governor.

The County has partnered with Self-Help Enterprises, a private nonprofit which has performed similar roles in five other California counties, assisting in program development.

“By partnering with a nonprofit such as Self-Help Enterprises, the program is eligible for 100 percent reimbursement through CDA,” said Skiles.

“I’ve heard great things about Self-Help Enterprises,” added Chiesa. “I think we’ve chosen a good one.”

TWA is designed for individuals to contact the Stanislaus County Office of Emergency Services, Stanislaus County Office Department of Environmental Resources or Self-Help Enterprises to submit an application.

From there, an emergency water oversight committee will review all applications and check to see which ones meet the specific criteria outlined in the CDAA, including the requirement that the applicant must be a homeowner residing at the site and the confirmed existence of a true emergency.

The application will then go directly to Self-Help Enterprises, which will perform an onsite inspection and installation, as well as arrange for a bulk water delivery to ensure that occupants receive regular water deliveries thereafter.

“Will this be all the water a resident needs? No. They’re going to have to ration like you can’t believe,” said O’Brien, “but at least it’ll be enough water for them to live in their house. That’s what is so important about this.”

For more information about the Stanislaus County Temporary Water Assistance program, visit [www.co.stanislaus.ca.us](http://www.co.stanislaus.ca.us) or call 552-2512.

Merced County has also begun accepting applications for emergency water delivery in an effort to assist residents affected by the drought.

“We understand that a lot of people are experiencing hardships right now because of the ongoing drought,” said John Pedrozo, chairperson of the Merced County Board of Supervisors. “At the County, we’re taking strides to help those in need.”

“The rollout of the Emergency Water Distribution Program and the unveiling of the revamped drought webpage are two examples of that,” continued Pedrozo.

The Emergency Water Distribution Program was initially created to provide a temporary water sources to homeowners with dry wells.

If approved for services, homeowners could receive deliveries of non-potable water at the rate of 50 gallons per person per day for health and sanitation purposes. Bottled water for drinking and cooking is also provided at the rate of one gallon per person per day. The non-potable water is delivered and pumped into a temporary water tank located on the subject property.

The County has also set up a drought-assistance hotline to aid residents that are looking for information about issues related to the drought. Through the hotline, callers can receive basic information about how to apply online for the Emergency Water Distribution. To reach the Merced County drought-assistance hotline, call 726-2705.

To access the drought webpage, visit [co.merced.ca.us/savewater](http://co.merced.ca.us/savewater). The webpage is available in more than 90 languages, including English, Spanish, Hmong and Punjabi and includes general information about the drought and information about the County’s Emergency Water Distribution Program