

# The Modesto Bee

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## County will discuss water issues, drought at meeting in Denair

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By Ken Carlson

As drought conditions intensify this summer, Stanislaus County's water advisory committee will hold a community meeting in Denair on emergency assistance and groundwater.

The meeting is set for 7 p.m. Aug. 12 at the Denair Community Center, 3850 Gratton Road. Keith Boggs, an assistant county chief executive officer, said Supervisor Vito Chiesa requested the meeting after a similar one was held in Knights Ferry on June 25. Chiesa and Supervisor Bill O'Brien represent areas in the eastern portion of the county where residents are concerned about groundwater, the drought and extensive planting of almond orchards fed by groundwater.

Some of their constituents have dry residential wells.

Boggs said he expects county water resources manager Walter Ward will talk about the advisory panel's work on groundwater planning. Officials also will discuss the county's three-pronged response to the harsh effects of the four-year drought:

The county has low-interest loans for homeowners who need to replace dry wells. Households with annual income below a cap of around \$83,000 are eligible. Senior applicants are given preference.

The county has teamed with Self-Help Enterprises to provide a temporary water supply to homeowners with dry wells. A storage tank and small pump will be installed to restore water to the home for residents, as they wait months for a drilling contractor to sink a new well. Eligibility is not based on income. A "Temporary Water Assistance Homeowner Application" is available at [www.stancounty.com](http://www.stancounty.com).

County staff members are working on incentives for well contractors to put residential customers higher on their waiting lists.

Chiesa said he wants residents who attend the Aug. 12 meeting to know what assistance is available and understand the county's work on long-term groundwater management. "There is uncertainty out there," Chiesa said. "We can't provide a lot of certainty, but we can let them know we are on the path to accomplish something."

The supervisor said he believes drillers can give more priority to domestic wells, so that homeowners don't have to wait nine months or longer for a new well. Drillers have been busy with orders for agricultural wells, for which the county issued hundreds of permits last year.

"Some of the agricultural folks are just wanting backup wells, and as long as they have water capabilities, we are trying to get the drillers to work on the domestics," Chiesa said.

He noted that board Chairman Terry Withrow has been talking with the drilling industry.