

TURLOCK JOURNAL

County kicks off water delivery program to dry well owners

August 25, 2015

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that was planted one year ago.

For the first time in three months Genaro Gil won't have to resort to bottled water to brush his teeth or wash his hands in his Ceres home.

Gil was the first county resident to receive a 2,600 gallon water tank on Tuesday through the recently implemented Temporary Water Assistance Program with the Stanislaus County Office of Emergency Services, which provides regular water deliveries to homeowners with dry wells as they wait for a new or deeper well.

"This is a blessing from the skies," said Gil. "Drillers are just overwhelmed, so thank God for this program. It has me smiling."

Gil attributed his depleted water supply to a number of factors, one of which was surrounding orchards, including a new almond orchard across the street from his residence

"These big orchards take a lot of water and it dries up shallower wells like mine," said Gil.

The homeowner said that he needs to drill his 40 foot well deeper by 85 feet, a project with an estimated price tag of \$26,000. In order to have this service completed, however, he said that he has been on a waitlist for the past 10 months.

This wait, although jaw-dropping for some, would be gladly accepted by county residents who requested a new or deeper well today, as Calwater Drilling Company supervisor Jim Nemitz said that his business has an average wait from one year to a year and a half long.

"Due to the high demand of wells, our business has been overwhelming," said Nemitz. "We're so busy it's unbelievable."

Nemitz said that the increased demand for drilling services has prompted the company to hire six more employees since the beginning of the drought.

The amount of time that a resident has to wait for drilling services depends on the specific situation, with priority given to elderly couples or dairies on the "no water" list. The drilling company also has an irrigation list and a domestic list.

"We try to get to them as soon as possible," said Nemitz.

Before he received his new water tank, Gil said that his dry well forced him to make biweekly trips to Costco Wholesale in order to buy pallets of bottled water.

He said that despite this inconvenience, he still considered himself "blessed" since he was able to stay a couple of days a week at his uncle's residence down the road, which is serviced with city water.

When Gil heard about the TWA Program through a local driller, he decided to apply and within a week workers from Wilkins Pump and Knickerbocker Electric were on his property to install a new water tank.

"This whole process was smooth and the county was very easy to work with in order to get this taken care of," said Gil.

If Gil is conservative, the potable water flowing through his newly-installed tank should last him anywhere between one to two weeks, according to Wilkins Pump and Knickerbocker Electric employee Mike Gratigny.

“He can use this water for everything in his home—for his dishwasher and even his sprinklers if he wants,” said Gratigny. “After he runs out, the program will send out a water truck to refill his tank.”

The TWA Program was approved last month by the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors as part of the revised Stanislaus Water Contingency Plan. At this time, the Board also proclaimed a local state of emergency in Stanislaus County due to the severity of the water shortage and the impacts of the drought to county residents.

“I just want to thank everybody that worked on bringing this water to our residents who are out of water,” said Supervisor William O’Brien. “It was a very quick turnaround in government time.”

The development of the TWA Program began earlier this year when O’Brien initially pushed his fellow supervisors to provide some form of assistance to homeowners without water.

Program costs are 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, to assist with program development.

Since its inception, the program has received 33 applications and Self-Help Enterprises has already completed eight site assessments. Three installs, including the installation at Gil’s residence in Ceres, are scheduled this week according to Assistant Director of Emergency Services and Fire Warden Dale Skiles.

“We also have five other installs that are waiting to be scheduled pending on paperwork completion between Self-Help Enterprises and the property owner,” said Skiles.

Skiles said that the TWA Program has also delivered water to five sites that already had a water tank, with another 12 site assessments scheduled for this week.

“Self-Help Enterprises brought on some additional help and this has helped tremendously,” said Skiles. “We appreciate them and the partnership.

“I am pleased to report that we actually have water flowing,” continued Skiles.

For more information on the program, call the Temporary Assistance Hotline at 552-3880.