

Porterville Recorder

Drought-stricken East Porterville focus of state officials' tour

KELLI BALLARD

June 19, 2015



Officials tour home of Yolanda Serrato
Yolanda Serrato talks about her experience using a 2,500-gallon water tank to a tour group of water officials Thursday at her home in East Porterville.

Five vans filled with representatives from the State Water Resources Control Board and community water centers toured East Porterville Thursday to get a better idea of what the drought-stricken community is going through.

“We put together this tour along with local entities who have been grappling with these problems to bring awareness to it,” said Dee Dee D’Adamo, a Control Board member. “It’s a great opportunity to get out on the ground and see what things are like.”

Officials will attend a meeting today in Hanford to discuss funding options to help with the drought, and Thursday’s tour was a way for them to get a better understanding of the seriousness of the situation.

The tour group arrived first at the home of Yolanda Serrato on Cleo Avenue to hear directly from a resident who has been experiencing hardship due to the drought.

“You never think of running out of water,” Serrato told the group. “You just turn on the faucet and you have water.” She explained how her well ran dry this past July. One day it was fine; the next day the pump was pulling up dirt. “I was thinking, ‘Oh my God, I’m going to die,’” she said.

Serrato showed the visitors her 2,500-gallon tank, provided by Tulare County to residents whose wells have gone dry, at the back of her home. She explained the tank worked great for getting nonpotable water into the house for bathing and other chores, but she has to rely on the county’s bottled water program for drinking water.

Paul Boyer of Self-Help Enterprises explained how there are currently about 1,000 wells in the county that have been reported dry. Approximately 100 tanks have been installed throughout the county, and Boyer said more than 50 of those have been placed in East Porterville.

As the tour group headed to their respective vehicles, a small convoy of vehicles led by Elva Beltran, director of the Porterville Area Coordinating Council (PACC), drove down the street honking their horns and holding signs out of their windows with big, red, bold letters reading “NO WATER.”

The state group continued to Iglesia Emmanuel Church on Leggett Street where community portable showers have been set up for residents without water. Pastor Roman Hernandez spoke to the group about the residents who come in regularly to take showers as well as pick up cases of bottled water.

“It is quite challenging to help bring drinking water to these homes that don’t have hookups,” said Eugene Leung, a senior sanitary engineer for the Control Board. “It’s very concerning with this drought.”

Leung said there are many variables to consider such as will the ground be able to recharge enough that wells will recover when it does rain, and do the people in East Porterville “want to continue their own way of life, using their own wells.”