

The Modesto Bee

Failed wells spell misery for valley residents

By Ken Carlson

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Stanislaus County has received 22 applications for a temporary water supply program for homeowners with failed wells.

Keith Boggs, assistant chief executive officer, said Thursday that the county and Self-Help Enterprises are working on program logistics and securing a contractor for tank installations.

In an agreement with the county, Self-Help will use contractors to install the 2,500-gallon tanks as a temporary supply for homeowners waiting for replacement wells. Funded by the state's emergency drought assistance, the program pays for the installation and 50 gallons of water daily per person. A service will refill the tank on a routine schedule.

"We have been reviewing the applications and approving them forward," Boggs said. "It's a one-page application with straightforward questions."

An oversight committee has approved all but one applicant, and Self-Help has begun inspecting home sites to verify information. An application for four rental units is being reviewed. Landlords may apply but are expected to pay for tank installations.

Valley Home resident Debra Crume said the realities of living without tap water are hard to imagine until it happens. You can't take a shower in your own home. And there's no water for laundry and other household needs, said Crume, whose 107-foot well dried out a month ago.

She and her husband use water from the Oakdale Irrigation District for their horses, cattle and dogs. That is until the irrigation season ends.

Crume said the prices for temporary water tanks from private businesses have risen sharply in the past year. A water hauler wants to charge \$400 for a load to refill a borrowed tank for their livestock, she added.

The price of a new well depends on the depth and costs for the pump installation. She lives a mile from retired court administrator Michael Tozzi, who spent \$32,000 for a 400-foot well and additional costs last year.

Tozzi contended with a dry well for seven months. "It was a horrific time for us," he said. "We still turn the water on and go – please."

Melba Hibbard, emergency services manager for the county, said the county had reports on 60 dry domestic wells as of last week. Applications for the temporary water assistance have come in from across the county, from Hickman, Denair, Waterford, Ceres, Newman and Patterson.

Self Help Enterprises also has approval to provide temporary storage tanks to Merced County homeowners. Cathy Rosenberger, who recently called The Bee, said it's common to hear about neighbors losing their wells. She's been trying to scrape together \$11,500 for a new well. The small ranch she inherited from her parents is west of Valley Home inside San Joaquin County. That county has been exploring a temporary water supply program.

For a time, Rosenberger was taking her son to a school in Sacramento, she said. The mother would stop at a home in Farmington for her son to take a shower and then they would hit the road.

She said she didn't qualify for a government loan for the well because she couldn't provide certain documentation.

"When you go to flush the toilet, there's no water and you have three kids hanging on you," Rosenberger said. "Our well went dry two years ago in August. ... It is really scary. I am at wit's end."

Applications for Stanislaus County's temporary water supply program are on the county website at www.stancounty.com