

# Modesto Bee

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## Homeowners with dry wells are getting relief from Stanislaus County program

August 28, 2015

By Ken Carlson



Homeowner Genaro Gil, right, speaks with installer Bryce Bryant on Tuesday in Ceres about the temporary water storage system he will have until he gets a new well. An installation team with Wilkins Pump brought and installed the large tank that will stay next to the house.

Genaro Gil did not wait nearly as long as some drought-weary homeowners for a fresh water source to supply his home.

Still, the past three months of living without tap water is an experience he would like to forget.

After the well went dry at his home south of Ceres, Gil said, he bought pallets of bottled water at Costco and learned he could make the toilet work with water from a hose stretched from a neighbor's property.

Life at the well-landscaped home has not been so charming for Gil and his fiancé. "I might not be getting married now," he

joked, as workers and media gathered at the home Tuesday morning.

Gil was the first distressed homeowner to receive a temporary storage tank through a Stanislaus County program that assists households waiting for new wells. The water itself would be delivered later in the day.

Oakdale-based Wilkins Pump, a contractor working for the county, connected a 3,000-gallon water tank and pump to Gil's home. The system restores water to the faucets until Gil can have a new well dug. Two or three other households are expected to receive storage tanks this week.

Dale Skiles, assistant director of the county Office of Emergency Services, said the program kicked off in the past week as water was delivered to five other applicants who have their own storage tanks.

Gil said he called a dozen drilling contractors in Northern California and was told he faces at least a 10-month wait for a new well. He was given an estimate of \$26,000 for a new well, pump and connections. His old well is 40 feet deep.

The county, which approved the program July 28, is getting kudos for its swift response to applications. Gil said he applied for the assistance a week and a half ago. The county's partner in the program is the nonprofit Self-Help Enterprises, which is managing the same program in five other counties.

“The process is really smooth and easy,” Gil said. “It is a blessing from the sky. You can’t believe what (a dry well) is like until it happens to you.”

Mike Gratigny, field supervisor for Wilkins, said the temporary system should provide normal water pressure to the home. Appliances such as washing machines and dishwashers should function.

He said the business has charged \$5,000 to \$6,000 to install the temporary systems privately for homeowners and some haulers have charged hundreds of dollars to refill the tanks.

According to program documents, the county program provides 50 gallons daily for each member of the household. The 3,000-gallon tank should supply Gil’s home for a month if the household uses 100 gallons a day.

The state’s \$1 billion emergency drought relief effort funds the program, so homeowners are not charged for the tank or refills. The county has contracted with two haulers to refill the storage tanks on a routine schedule.

Of the 32 applications to the county, eight on-site assessments have been done to confirm the owners have a feasible plan for replacing their dry wells, Skiles said. Staff members will continue to work through the applications in the coming weeks. The county, which has asked people to report their failed domestic wells, has received information on 65 dry wells.

Gil, who commutes to work in the Bay Area, said he has access to water from Turlock Irrigation District for his landscaping. He said he will stay on the project to replace the old well.

Henry Trevino of rural Ceres said he submitted an online application to the county last week and has an assessment scheduled at his home for Wednesday.

Trevino, whose well went dry almost a year ago, couldn’t see an end to his nightmare until hearing about the drought relief last week. He said he still faces a 10- to 11-month wait for a new well.

The county has established a temporary water assistance hotline for residents to learn about the program. The number is 209-552-3880. Applications are available at [www.stancounty.com](http://www.stancounty.com).