

Well failing? County wants to know

OFFICIALS COMPILING WAIT LIST FOR PENDING EMERGENCY PROGRAM

By Seth Nidever

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Kings County supervisors put their final stamp of approval Tuesday on an emergency water distribution plan designed to provide a backstop for residents who lost their water supply because of drought.

Though the program technically isn't operational just yet, county leaders are taking down the names of homeowners who need an in-house water supply for showers, toilets and sinks because their well has either failed or is about to.

Michelle Speer, Kings County's emergency services coordinator, said she's looking for sign-ups for anybody in trouble.

"If anybody has a private well that has gone dry or is going dry, they can report that to my office," she said.

The county has been collecting a well trouble/failure list since October 2014. Forty-four names are on it, according to Speer.

Once the program goes live, tanks will be divvied out on a first-reported, first-served basis.

"People need to contact me so they can get on that list," Speer said.

The program is designed to be relatively simple. Self-Help Enterprises, based in Visalia, will administer it on the behalf of the county and make 2,500-gallon tanks available for up to a year to meet the sanitation and hygiene needs of qualified homeowners.

Certified water haulers will transport the water to fill the tanks.

The idea is that the tanks will be a stopgap measure while the homeowner looks for a permanent solution (i.e. get a new well drilled or tap into a municipal system).

The tank water cannot be used for landscape irrigation. The limit will likely be 50 gallons per person per day for sanitation and hygiene, while bottled water will probably be provided for cooking and drinking at the rate of one gallon per person per day.

Participants have to demonstrate that their well has failed or is going dry, fill out an application with Self-Help Enterprises and live in Kings County.

Self-Help Enterprises officials couldn't be immediately reached for comment.

Speer said Self-Help is already implementing programs for other San Joaquin Valley counties. She said the nonprofit organization has identified vendors willing to supply water tanks for the program. Speer said Kings County officials have reached out to local "entities" willing to sell water.

She declined to name those entities because formal agreements haven't been signed with them yet.

For now, Speer wants Kings County residents in trouble to contact her office directly. She said she will forward the information to Self-Help.

Speer said that all costs incurred by Self-Help to run the program are reimbursable by the state. The cost to participating residents is zero.

Kings is behind other counties that have already implemented emergency water programs. Tulare County, with hundreds of wells failing in east Porterville, was an early adopter.

Speer said Kings County's plan was modeled after one in Merced County.

Kings County Supervisor Doug Verboon called Tulare County's well failure problem "devastating."

"It hasn't happened here yet," he said.

"We've got to look to the future," said Supervisor Richard Fagundes. "There are a lot of big changes coming."

"It feels good to have a safety net there," said Supervisor Richard Valle. "I think it's important to stay on point even when it's raining."