

Program offers free tanks and water to local families with dry wells because of drought

By Kristin Price

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While drought conditions are slightly improving statewide -- the drought here in Kern County is still considered exceptional to extreme in its severity.

Water wells are going dry for some local families, leaving them with no running water. The county is offering free emergency water tank installation to alleviate the burden. Families who've taken advantage say it's a huge relief as the cost to fix the problem isn't cheap and the cost of hauling water in the meantime quickly adds up.

Juanita Garcia's family hasn't had running water since July. "It's been really tough," said Garcia.

For the past eight months, her grandfather filled up water jugs daily for the family to wash dishes, take showers and flush the toilet.

Garcia said, "That's when you think wow water is really essential and we took it for granted."

The family began working on a solution: connecting to the city's water source. It's a \$12,000 job, but Garcia could only afford to pay half.

Garcia said, "I remember being at the loan office where they couldn't give me the full amount I needed and I cried. It was really devastating."

Her family now has a temporary fix. A 2,600 gallon water tank, filled for free.

Depending on the size of the family, a home may require multiple water deliveries each month to fill the tanks. Experts say each haul costs from \$400 to \$500.

Self-Help enterprises, project manager David Mendez: "The point of this program is that money can go toward a savings account to get a permanent solution."

Garcia plans to do exactly that.

Garcia said. "I wish I knew about it so I didn't have to rush into getting a loan. It's a very exciting day for all of us."

The program is funded by the state's emergency drought relief package and made possible through a partnership between Kern County Public Health, Self-Help Enterprises, Community Action Partnership of Kern and local water companies. To qualify, a well must be dry because of drought. For more information call Kern County Public Health 661-862-8776.