

THE PORTERVILLE RECORDER

Residents briefed on water solutions

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By Kelli Ballard



Greg Farley, drought manager for the state Department of Water Resources, speaks Sunday during a meeting about the drought at John J. Doyle Elementary School.

Porterville area residents were updated Sunday by state and local officials about what is being done to help residents whose water wells have gone dry.

The meeting was called by the newly formed East Porterville for Water Justice Committee. The committee's goal is to "help facilitate communications between residents and officials," said Ryan Jensen of the committee.

About 50 residents from East Porterville and the west side met at John J. Doyle Elementary School, eager to learn how quickly their homes will be hooked up to a water system.

Officials from the City of Porterville, Tulare County, the State Water Resources Board, Self-Help Enterprises, the state Department of Water Resources and the Porterville Area Coordinating Council took time out of their Sunday evening to update residents about the effort.

"We are working closely with the other agencies to put together a solution, a water solution," said Greg Farley, drought manager for the Department of Water Resources. "Our goal is to get the 500, roughly, people with dry wells hooked up [to the City of Porterville's water system] by the end of the year."

Farley said the state is conducting surveys of the area, while also putting together plans and working on a feasibility study.

"This is an unprecedented emergency," he said. "Tulare County has over 2,000 dry wells, and so it's unprecedented. In the 170 years of California we haven't seen this. It's a big challenge."

"This type of emergency response is new. It's never been done before," said Denise England, water resources program manager for Tulare County. "The state is learning and evolving."

England said there are plenty of challenges. For the household tank program in which the county provides 1,500- to 2,500-gallon tanks and fills them with potable water for residents without water, England said the county and state have been working on ways to make sure rental homes receive the tanks as well. She said her office sent out letters to the landlords of the 194 properties known to be rentals without water.

"We received a total of seven responses," England said. "Five wouldn't say who they are, one is working with us, and one had to be reclassified as not a rental." Out of the 194 properties, the county is only providing a tank to one, she said.

The officials emphasized that while it may seem to residents like it's taking a long time to find a permanent solution to their water woes, they have been working on it for quite a while.

"We knew the problem out here in East Porterville was so big that we couldn't just go out and do something for that permanent solution," England said. "It had to be well thought out and planned out."

The committee meets from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. on the third Sunday of each month.