

The Hanford Sentinel

Lemoore approves water sale

Becomes first Kings County city to join drought-relief program

By Seth Nidever

April 12, 2016



An example of an emergency water tank setup for a homeowner with a failing/failed well who needs temporary help. Lemoore has become the first Kings County city to agree to sell water to a Visalia-based nonprofit to supply Kings County residents in this predicament

LEMOORE —Lemoore is the first Kings County city to provide temporary water to residents outside city limits who are suffering from failed wells.

The Lemoore City Council unanimously approved a contract last week with Self-Help Enterprises of Visalia to sell water to the nonprofit organization for an emergency dry well assistance program.

The program supplies a temporary plastic tank filled with water that connects to a home's plumbing. The water supplies the shower, toilet and washing needs of residents whose wells have gone dry. Bottled water would be supplied for cooking and drinking needs.

The program includes a requirement that participants be actively planning to have a new well dug. Residents can receive the emergency water help for up to 12 months. According to Lemoore City Manager Andi Welsh, the water sold by Lemoore will stay in Kings County.

The water will be pumped from a service connection in the vicinity of 19th and Idaho avenues, according to city officials.

"I felt that it was important to support, on a temporary basis, people who have had their wells go dry," Welsh said.

The vote was 5-0, but it didn't come without a lot of debate about the pros and cons.

The issue of water conservation mandates being imposed by the state came up in the discussion.

"The city is already asking our residents to reduce water [use]," said Lemoore Public Works Director Nathan Olson. "We're cutting back on water [use] as a whole."

Olson sought to reassure council member that the water to be sold — no more than 1 acre-foot a month — is a tiny fraction of the monthly output of the city's wells.

Olson estimated that the wells put out 5,000 acre-feet of water a month.

"It's a drop in the bucket that Self-Help Enterprises would be [receiving]," said Mayor Pro Tem Jeff Chedester.

Olson said that the water sold to Self-Help would be subtracted from the total monthly use the city reports to the state as part of the conservation mandate.

The city will charge Self-Help \$8 per 1,000 gallons for water sold through the program for the first six months.

Olson said that's significantly more than city residents are currently being charged.

Proceeds will go toward the operation of Lemoore's water system, according to Welsh. The contract with Self-Help expires after two years.

Michelle Speer, Kings County's emergency services coordinator, said that Kingsburg is the only other city that has agreed to supply water to needy Kings County residents.

Speer said that makes sense because Kingsburg straddles the Fresno/Kings county line. Speer said that well failures are concentrated in the northeastern part of Kings County not far from the county line.

Speer said an agreement with Hanford is pending.

People spoke out in favor of the sale.

"I think if it's humanly possible to help our communities, we should do it," said Lemoore Resident Connie Wlaschin. "I can't imagine turning on a faucet and not having any water come out."

"We need to help those in need," said Lemoore resident Tom Reed.

Susan Atkins, a program director at Self-Help, said the magnitude of the well failure problem "far exceeds" Kings County.

Among San Joaquin Valley counties Self-Help is operating the program in, Atkins said Kings has been "least affected."