

Hardwick getting new well

Tiny community's main water supply dried up in March

By Seth Nidever

June 2, 2016



HANFORD – Drought-slammed residents in the tiny Kings County community of Hardwick, northwest of Hanford, are finally witnessing what they hope will be a permanent solution to persistent water problems.

Construction is underway on a new well that residents hope will solve several water issues they've been suffering from.

"They've been working on [the problem] for quite a few years," said Alvin Lea, a Hardwick Water Company director who lives in the town. "Finally something's happening. People are happy that it's finally getting done."

The Hardwick Water Company well that supplied about half of the community's 41 homes went dry in March, leaving residents with no way to flush their toilets.

Crews from Bradley & Sons Drilling work Thursday on the new well for the Hardwick Water Company. The \$500,000 project, which will supply about half of Hardwick's residents, is expected to start operating in late June/early July

After a few days of residents using portable toilets that were set up outside, Kings County officials brought in a 1,000-gallon portable tank.

Residents filled up containers at the tank and took it back to their homes to flush their bathroom toilets, according to Maria Herrera, a community development specialist with Visalia-based Self-Help Enterprises.

The nonprofit organization has been working with the community to address water needs.

With the help of Kings County Supervisor Doug Verboon, the tank was replaced with a larger, 5,000-gallon version. Workers hooked it into a central distribution system serving the users formerly supplied by the failed community well.

Herrera said the county is trucking in water daily from Hickey Park to fill up the tank, which supplies water for toilet flushing and showering.

Bottled water is being supplied for drinking and cooking.

Herrera said the costs of the temporary program are being paid for through state drought emergency funding.

So is the new well, which is expected to cost more than \$500,000.

The well is slated to become operational by late June/early July.

Herrera said the emergency drought situation — the sinking water table simply left the well high and dry — made state funding "easier to access."

“I think certainly when you’re out of water, it does expedite things,” Herrera said. “You have to treat it as an emergency.”

The town is too small to do major infrastructure improvements without outside financial assistance.

Drought is only one of Hardwick’s water woes.

The neighborhood has been experiencing high uranium concentrations in its water for years. The uranium is naturally occurring.

Water coming out of the old well came with a warning about uranium levels exceeding state health limits.

According to Lea, many residents turned to bottled water for their cooking and drinking needs.

As far back as April 2013, a feasibility study paid for by Proposition 84 funds included the drilling of test wells in an attempt to find better water.

Lea and others believe that the new, deeper well, which is located on county fire station property, will solve the uranium problem.

“We found a sweet spot,” said Verboon, whose county supervisorial district includes Hardwick. “The water they’ll be getting will be the best possible quality.”

Verboon called the new well “a make-or-break deal” for Hardwick.

“Without this well, residents could each individually drill a well on their property for about \$25,000 per well,” he said.

Lea said the water company would like to get more of the homes hooked into the main water system. The more residents who buy in, the cheaper per-household costs of maintaining and operating the system.

Herrera said she’s applied for a grant to replace Hardwick’s aging, rusted pipes. She said the grant could expand the centralized pipe system to bring more independent water users into the Hardwick Water Company fold.

Lea said that “at least five” private homes not on the system have had their wells go dry. He said some residents have received smaller emergency water tanks through a county-run emergency program that supplies trucked-in water.

Lea said there are six or seven homeowners in the neighborhood who still want to have their own individual wells. He thinks others would join if given the chance.

Aside from the uranium, the other problem in the town’s groundwater is arsenic – an issue common to many Kings County cities.

It’s an issue that puts Hardwick between a rock and a hard place.

Drought is lowering the water table. In general, the lower it goes, the more arsenic there is.

The new well is being drilled to 485 feet (the old well was approximately 180 feet deep), but the casing is only perforated to about 220 feet. That seems to be the “sweet spot” Verboon was talking about.

If the water table keeps dropping, he said that perforation can be added to the casing lower down to suck water from deeper strata as needed.