

County continues emergency drought assistance

By Ryan McLaughlin

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It's no secret that for the past several years, California has been hit with one of the worst droughts on record. However, during these troubling times there are some who feel the effects of the crippling conditions harder than others.

On July 28, 2015, the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors proclaimed a local State of Emergency countywide due to severe drought conditions and their effects on county residents. The Board also approved a Temporary Water Assistance Program that would place water tanks at homes where domestic wells had run dry.

During Tuesday's meeting, the Board accepted the 12th update on the TWA program and approved to continue the ongoing countywide State of Emergency.

The Stanislaus County Office of Emergency Services has received 82 homeowner applications for the TWA program to date. Of the 50 water tanks that have been installed since the program's inception, 21 have been removed due to successful drilling of new wells or repair of old wells, leaving 29 tanks still in service.

"There's definitely a backlog of drillers in these conditions," said Melba Hibbard, Office of Emergency Services manager. "Right now the wait time to get a new well drilled is between three to nine months once they're on the waitlist."

With dozens of private land owners struggling in their search for water, the demand for well-drilling services has been exceeding supply. But since the TWA program first started, the wait time has slowly begun to drop for those looking for a new well.

"It used to be at least a year wait minimum this time last year," said Hibbard. "With so many wells going dry all at once, the well drillers have really stepped up and made progress this past year."

The program is made possible by the California Disaster Assistance Act which is responsible for providing financial assistance from the state for costs incurred by local governments as a result of a disaster. The CDAA guidelines for funding allow for a 100 percent refund of costs if the relief is administered by a non-profit organization as opposed to a 75 percent refund if administered by Stanislaus County — enter Self-Help Enterprises.

SHE has been providing assistance to counties in need across the Central Valley including Merced, San Joaquin and Fresno County since the beginning of the current drought.

While Stanislaus County residents welcome the aid with open arms, the need for more permanent solutions to water conservation is becoming a more pressing issue.

"It's important that people know that this program is out there and available to homeowners for free," said Hibbard.

With rain and snow levels showing signs of improvement from recent years, it is certainly not enough to pull California out of this drought, at least not yet. Conservation right now remains a major key to sustainability.

For more information about the TWA program, visit stanemergency.com or call the TWA hotline at 552-3880