

THE PORTERVILLE RECORDER

County hands tank program to Self-Help Enterprises

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By: Myles Barker

Organization to be in full control

Self-Help Enterprises is taking over the water tank program put in place to help Tulare County residences whose wells went dry during the drought.

On Tuesday, the Board of Supervisors approved the agreement which first came about when the state said it would stop funding the drought relief program. Now, the state has agreed to continue the funding for another year and that non-profits, such as Self-Help, could apply for the funds to run the program.

"I would like to thank Self-Help in assisting us in this transition," said Jason Britt, the county's Health and Human Services Agency director. "This would not be possible if not for them."

Britt said the transition will begin on July 1 or whenever the last party signs, whichever is earlier.

The county placed hundreds of tanks — 1,500 or 2,500 gallons each — around the county, mostly in East Porterville, as more than 1,500 wells went dry during the four-year drought. All of the tanks in East Porterville have been or will soon be removed because that area is being connected to the City of Porterville's municipal water system. Still, the county has more than 400 tanks spread out over the county.

In addition to being in full control of the tank program, Britt said Self-Help Enterprises will also assume liability and risk for the program.

Additionally, the Board also authorized the county's Health and Human Services Agency to allow Self-Help Enterprises to access the county's water sources contracted for the Household Tank Program through a reimbursement process, if feasible and appropriate.

Britt said the county will assist Self-Help Enterprises with securing water until "they can get all of their water agreements in place." Nevertheless, Britt said the assistance is not to go beyond two months.

Britt said Self-Help Enterprises will reimburse the county 100 percent for water purchased under the agreement. He did note, however, that if, for some reason, Self-Help Enterprises doesn't reimburse the county, the county would have to cover the cost.

Steven Worthley, District Four supervisor and vice chairman, questioned if there was a possibility if the 440 households in the county that are currently on the tank program can work with Self-Help Enterprises and purchase the tanks and provide water themselves when funding from the state ends, which he said is set for June 30, 2018.

"If not, we are going to be back here with another emergency," Worthley said.

Britt said the plan is that the county will get to a permanent solution for those without a reliable source of water before June 2018.

"Ideally, that would be the hope," Britt said.