

THE PORTERVILLE RECORDER

Program offers free nitrate testing for households with private wells

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By: The Porterville Recorder

Self-Help Enterprises (SHE), a community development organization that works with communities on water and wastewater issues, is offering free water well testing through April 30 to help residents learn about their water quality, said Sonia Sanchez, a communication and outreach specialist with SHE.

Sanchez said the families of pregnant women and infants, who are among the most vulnerable populations, are encouraged to have their well water tested. She said infant formula made with water that has high nitrate levels can restrict the flow of oxygen to the body and can lead to “blue baby syndrome” or even death.

Additionally, Sanchez said cooking with nitrate-contaminated water is also dangerous as the nitrates become more concentrated when water is boiled.

Sanchez said wells in the area commonly contain unsafe levels of nitrates, which she said are odorless and have no taste.

“Therefore, the only way to know if your well water has nitrates is to test the water,” Sanchez said.

Sanchez said the program, funded by the Central Valley Salinity Alternatives for Long-Term Sustainability (CV SALTS), will collect and test water samples at no cost to the resident. She said participation forms can be obtained at the Porterville WIC office, the Family HealthCare Network clinic in Porterville or by scheduling an appointment with SHE.

Sanchez said a staff member will meet clients at their home at a designated time to collect a water sample. To schedule an appointment, call Donna Mae Perdew at 802-1678. Sanchez said results are usually provided within one week.

Sanchez said the United States Environmental Protection Agency has set the Maximum Contamination Level for nitrates at 10 mg/L. If test results exceed this level, Sanchez said a free replacement water option is provided at no cost through bottled water deliveries or an installation of a Point of Use (POU) Water Filtration device. Sanchez said a POU device is installed at a single water connection, typically under the counter of a kitchen sink. She said the system will filter the water through reverse osmosis and deliver water that is suitable for drinking.

Sanchez said Norma Garcia, who lives on a ranch near Porterville with her husband and two toddlers, participated in the program and learned her well water was unsafe.

“When I got the call I immediately stopped using the water,” says Garcia. “I was worried about my children’s health so I stopped using it for cooking and even washing food.”

Abigail Solis, a community development specialist with SHE, said thousands of Tulare County residents rely on private wells, and don’t know what contaminants are in their drinking water.

“We encourage residents to participate in this free program to learn about their water quality and help keep their family healthy,” Solis said.