

FOX 26

Governor Gavin Newsom signs emergency water bill at Fresno County school

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By: Liz Gonzalez

FRESNO COUNTY, Calif. (KMPH)-- — Students at Riverview Elementary in Fresno County got a lesson in how the government works from an unlikely teacher: Governor Gavin Newsom.

He signed an emergency drinking water bill while leaning on a desk at the school, just outside of Reedley, Wednesday afternoon.

"We're talking about being the fifth largest economy in the world. We've got this bravado, our ingenuity, our entrepreneurial spirit and we can't even provide basic drinking water to a million plus Californians," Newsom said. "Pathetic."

Students at Riverview rely on water coolers rather than drinking fountains, after the chemical known as 1,2,3 trichloropropane or t-c-p was found in its water last year.

Long-term exposure has been shown to cause cancer in animals, and it can affect body weight and kidney function.

And it's not the first time it's been detected.

"That's a little scary, I've worked 19 years here, I drank a lot of water here... as well as people who live in this area," says Lori Wolter, a Kindergarten teacher at the school.

The emergency drinking water bill, AB 72 sponsored by State Senator Melissa Hurtado of Sanger, will provide \$131 million dollars in one-time funds to pay for bottled water, emergency supplies and technical support to water districts.

"It is a challenge every minute, ever day," says Elizabeth Brasfield, who works with Self-Help Enterprises.

According to its website, [Self-Help is helping 85 small disadvantaged communities](#) and schools in the Central Valley find permanent solutions to unsafe water.

It helps them identify the source of the problem and then apply for planning grants or work with an engineer to come up with a solution.

It also helps schools apply for construction grants from the State Water Board.

She says issues have been found from Saucelito Elementary School in Terra Bella, to Centerville Elementary School, just outside of Sanger.

"It could be high levels of arsenic. It could be high levels of 1,2,3 TCP. It could be uranium, huge amounts of nitrates," Brasfield says.

She is optimistic the bill will help.

"That's great, for now. But what do we do in a long-term basis?" she says.

"I'm being candid about this, but this is an inadequate response to a legitimate crisis," Newsom said.

His next push will be for a permanent, new source of funding to guarantee clean water for all – which he admits could be a struggle.

He knows he'll find opposition "if I said 'fee', if I said 'tax.'"

"I'm gonna give it a go, but I've got the politics of this. I'm not naive," Newsom said. "We're gonna get this done one way or another. We made a down payment, and I hope that's proof of not just interest but a commitment to do so."