

# Safe and Affordable Fund for Equity and Resilience (SAFER)

## GLOSSARY



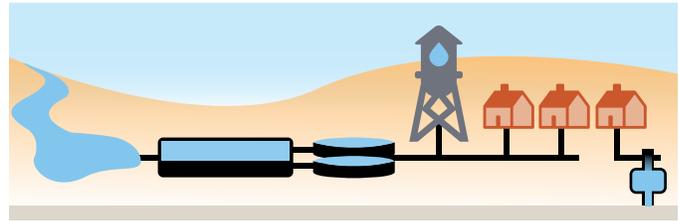
*This glossary was developed to make the technical language around safe drinking water easier to understand, and help build a foundation for community participation in the Safe and Affordable Fund for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) implementation process.*

### Water Equity Terms:

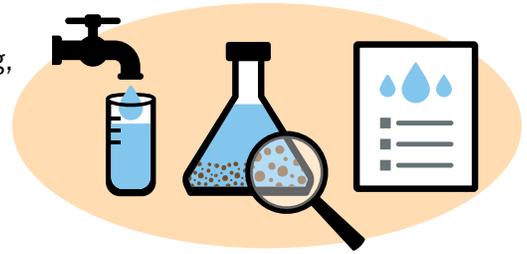
- **Human Right to Water:** Everyone has a right to safe, clean, accessible, and affordable water. The Human Right to Water is protected by law in California and prioritizes water for personal and domestic uses, such as drinking, cooking and basic hygiene, over industry and agricultural uses. State agencies such as the Department of Water Resources (DWR) and the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) must consider the Human Right to Water when revising, adopting or establishing policies and regulations. For more information: <https://bit.ly/3bvdJxc>.
- **Water Equity:** meeting everyone's water needs, and sharing benefits and risks equally. Water equity is achieved when policies and practices make sure that clean, safe, and affordable drinking water is available, especially for historically underrepresented communities. Under the Safe and Affordable Fund for Equity and Resilience (SAFER), water equity is protecting community and environmental needs threatened by unsafe and unaffordable drinking water, regardless of geography, wealth, and other factors.
- **Resiliency:** the ability to recover quickly from difficulties. Water resilience is the ability for water systems and communities to function so that nature and people can handle stresses like Climate Change and the current drought in California while still having their basic needs met. Under the Safe and Affordable Fund for Equity and Resilience (SAFER), water resiliency is ensuring communities have reliable access to safe and affordable water even during emergencies or in times of drought.
- **Water Affordability:** the ability to pay for safe drinking water and wastewater services without compromising your ability to pay for other needs or bills. Water rates have been rising in California and across the country for decades, making bills unaffordable for many families, especially in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color, and leading to debt and shutoffs. In 2019, California created the Safe and Affordable Fund for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) to ensure access to safe and affordable water for all Californians, regardless of their income level and location.

## Water Terms:

- **Community or public water system:** a system that produces and distributes drinking water to a specific group of local residents. An entire system can include wells, pipelines, treatment facilities, staff and more to distribute the drinking water. These systems may be publicly owned (by a city or special district) or privately owned (by a mutual water company, mobile home park owner, or investor-owned utility) but still be classified as public because they serve the public. Many community or public water systems in the San Joaquin Valley rely on shallow groundwater wells that could go dry or become contaminated. For more information: <https://bit.ly/3ICjv21>.
- **Water Quality:** describes the condition water is in, and how safe water is for drinking, bathing, swimming, or fishing. To ensure safe drinking water, government groups set a standard called a Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL, see #15) for chemicals like lead or arsenic that can be dangerous to human health when consumed. Water quality standards help provide evidence needed to justify upgrading failing water systems that the Safe and Affordable Fund for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) Program can pay for, especially in historically disadvantaged communities where current water sources do not meet safe drinking standards. For more information: <https://bit.ly/3AyQOLD>.
- **Contaminants:** defined in the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) as any physical, chemical, biological, or radiological substance or matter in water. Not all contaminants are harmful but the 90 naturally-occurring and man-made contaminants listed by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) pose health risks for humans when consumed at certain levels, and there are many more chemicals whose safety is currently being studied. Additionally, the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) requires the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to publish a Drinking Water Contaminant Candidate List (CCL) every five years. This list includes contaminants that are currently not subject to national regulations, but are known or anticipated to occur in public water systems and may require future regulation.
- **Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL):** the highest level of any physical, chemical, biological, or radiological substance or matter that is allowed in drinking water. Drinking water supplies are tested against Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs) regularly to ensure water systems are providing safe and clean drinking water. The process for developing Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs) can be a long and slow process, which leads to delays in getting toxic substances out of drinking water. Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs) can be developed by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) or the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB). The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) must consider protecting health and the economic cost in their development of Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs). It is important that the process to develop Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs) is not delayed since delays lead to people consuming unsafe drinking water and increased risks of illnesses and diseases. For more information: <https://bit.ly/3uRLRky>.



- Water quality sampling:** the process of testing the condition of water to determine how safe water is for drinking, swimming, and fishing. Sampling takes small amounts of water from sources (like rivers and wells) and tests it for unsafe levels of contamination, to ensure compliance with safety standards such as Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCL). Water samples must be regularly tested by drinking water providers to ensure water is safe for human consumption, but testing is expensive and requires professional laboratory analysis. These barriers often lead to unsafe water coming out of taps in historically disadvantaged communities. Public Water Systems are required to inform their customers of any water quality violations; watch for notices in your water bill or mail.



## Technical Terms:

- Needs Assessment:** Every year, the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) conducts a needs assessment that looks at safety, affordability, and reliability of every water system across California. This assessment helps to identify systems that are “Not-At-Risk”, “Failing,” or “At-Risk” of failing to provide safe drinking water to the communities that depend on them. Once the needs assessment is completed, the Safe and Affordable Fund for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) Advisory Group makes recommendations for solutions to the problems these water systems are experiencing and sends it to the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB). Solutions may include consolidation with larger water systems, money to cover operations and maintenance costs, building local technical and managerial capacity, providing bottled water or water tanks, and hiring administrators to run the small systems.
- Three blue water drop icons arranged horizontally. The first has a green checkmark, the second has a yellow minus sign, and the third has a red 'X'.
- “At-risk” systems:** are close to failing the standards set by the Safe and Affordable Fund for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) program. These standards include: water quality, accessibility, affordability, and technical, managerial, and financial (TMF) capacity. Systems that are “at-risk” need interim (short-term) and long-term solutions. For more information: <https://bit.ly/3B3lfu7>.
  - Interim (short-term) solutions:** are temporary fixes for drinking water challenges. For example: when a well goes dry, an interim (short-term) solution is to truck water into the communities that depend on that well and filling up large tanks people can use for immediate needs. Hauling water is a temporary fix until a long-term solution is identified and built.
- An illustration showing a black water truck with a large tank on its side, and a black storage tank with a blue water drop icon on its side.
- Emergency solutions:** when a drinking water system fails to provide safe drinking water to a community, emergency solutions provide immediate fixes (that may not be the permanent solution). For example: when a water source near a farm gets contaminated by agricultural run-off, an emergency solution is to provide bottled water for each household that depends on that water source until a long-term solution is identified. Moving from emergency solutions to long-term solutions, like upgraded water treatment or connection to a safe water system nearby, has been difficult because permanent solutions require substantial funding and coordination, and water safety problems most often occur in disadvantaged communities with less resources and funding.

- **Fund Expenditure Plan:** directs how money from the Safe and Affordable Fund for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) program can be spent to fix short- and long-term water problems affecting drinking. The fund expenditure plan works in two ways: first, it's used to identify which water systems are broken or failing and how to fix them, and second, the plan determines how much money is needed to fix the identified broken or failing water systems.
- **Funding solutions categories:** if a broken or failing water system can be fixed and paid for through the Fund Expenditure Plan, the project has access to different types of funding: technical assistance, planning, construction, operation and maintenance, and administrators. Each category represents a different process to make sure there are no gaps in funding and fixing a water system project is done correctly.

➔ **Technical assistance:** a service available to help with the application and planning process when water systems projects are ready to apply for funding. Technical assistance can include but is not limited to support such as facilitation of operation and maintenance, engineering and environmental analysis, legal assistance, leak detection/water audits, compliance audits, financial analysis, etc.



➔ **Planning projects/funding:** refers to all the organizing of information and conducting of research needed to find long and short-term solutions to a failing water system. The planning phase needs to be funded first before moving on to the construction phase. It includes environmental review, engineering design, cost estimating, and other work needed to get the project ready for construction.



➔ **Construction projects/funding:** includes all costs to repair or replace a failing water system project. For example: system consolidation efforts, new equipment, new sources of water, installation of water meters, replacement of leaking or aging pipes, installation of solar energy systems, replacement of inefficient pumps, etc. Different funding programs include different project elements in construction funding vs. planning funding.



➔ **Operation and Maintenance:** includes all costs and fees associated with operating and maintaining a water system. For example: maintenance/repairs, water quality sampling, buying supplies and chemicals, equipment, insurance, regulatory fees, energy bills, paperwork filing and administrative fees, as well as training and paying hands-on help like water system operators and staff.



➔ **Administrators:** refers to paying the people, businesses, non-profit organizations, local agencies, including counties or nearby larger utilities, and other entities that step in to help run a water system, usually on a temporary basis. For example: administrators may be assigned broad duties such as acting as general manager for the designated water system, or specific duties, such as managing an infrastructure improvement project for the designated water system.



- **Technical, Managerial and Financial (TMF) assessment:** The Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) requires a technical, managerial, and financial (TMF) assessment be completed if a public water system is seeking funding for replacement or change of ownership. This requirement makes sure water systems work properly, have long-term sustainability, and are able to provide safe drinking water for the people who depend on them. The technical, managerial, and financial (TMF) elements include the water system project budget, operations plan, training operations staff, an emergency response plan, and more. For more information: <https://bit.ly/3Qgh7KZ>.

## Policy Terms:

- **Safe and Affordable Fund for Equity and Resilience (SAFER):** a program created in 2019 to fill the funding gaps for California’s overlooked communities who currently lack safe drinking water and help them receive funding as quickly as possible. With up to \$130 million committed annually until 2030, the Safe and Affordable Fund for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) is the only funding program for operations and maintenance of California’s most vulnerable water systems right now. After decades of no investment by state and local government, implementation of the program is being guided by a community of water users and advocates (see #6) who work together to find solutions to water problems, from bottled water delivery to treatment plant updates and connections to nearby safe water systems.
- **Safe and Affordable Fund for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) Advisory Group:** a group of community members, water agency representatives, and advocates that meet up to four times per year to discuss and prioritize California water systems in need of support, the solutions that work best for them, and to provide feedback on the Safe and Affordable Fund for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) Fund Expenditure Plan for the State Water Board. The SAFER Advisory Group makes recommendations to the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) to ensure the Safe and Affordable Fund for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) money reaches the areas in most need of access to safe drinking water. For more information: <https://bit.ly/30knUSY>.
- **State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB), or State Water Board:** a California government agency with five full-time board members appointed by the Governor who serve four-year terms. The State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) is responsible for overseeing drinking water systems in the state as well as protecting California’s lakes, bays, rivers and streams. The State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) is also responsible for stepping in to protect groundwater if the Department of Water Resources (DWR) fails to do so.
- **Senate Bill 200 (SB 200):** a law that established a safe and affordable fund for equity and resilience focusing on solutions for disadvantaged communities in California that currently do not have access to safe and clean drinking water. The bill makes \$130 million available per year through 2030 to help water providers with their operating costs and gives public agencies, nonprofits, utilities, and tribes the opportunity to apply for funding to remediate their drinking water problems.
- **Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA):** a federal law that governs water quality regulations. The Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) was passed in 1974, giving the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) the power to set legal standards for drinking water safety. The Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) applies to every public water system in the country, but does not cover private wells. Currently, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has legal standards for 90 naturally-occurring and man-made contaminants that are hazardous to human health. For more information: <https://bit.ly/3yMxiZQ>.

- **Title 22:** as part of the California Code of Regulations (CCR), Title 22, Division 4, Chapter 12 establishes rules for safe drinking water standards to make sure water quality that is provided to human customers of public water systems is safe to drink. It is the California version of the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) which sets water quality standards and Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs) for drinking water quality across the nation. For more information: <https://bit.ly/3yMxiZQ>.
- **Prop 218:** known as the “Right to Vote on Taxes Act” and is a tool designed to provide property owners with greater involvement in the process of deciding taxes and fees, including setting water rates (and to prevent the government from increasing taxes and fees, including utility rates without public approval). Prop 218 protects the public’s right to participate and engage with decisions about their water rates system but it also has drawbacks like keeping rates artificially low and postponing routine maintenance and improvements. For more information: <https://bit.ly/3JcCyL7>.

## How to Participate:

1. Sign up to receive updates about the Safe and Affordable Fund for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) program: <https://bit.ly/3OV3d07>.
2. Review the results of the Drinking Water Needs Assessment, which is completed annually and provides information and recommendations to guide the work of the SAFER program: <https://bit.ly/3UmUmbt>.
3. Reach out to Leadership Counsel, Self-Help Enterprises or Community Water Center to learn more about how to get involved with the Safe and Affordable Fund for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) Program, and/or how your community can access funding.
4. Apply to become a Safe and Affordable Fund for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) Advisory Group Member: <https://bit.ly/3OknUSY>.
5. Attend a Safe and Affordable Fund for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) Advisory Group Meeting to raise concerns about water contamination or accessibility in your community or ask questions about the work they are doing: <https://bit.ly/3OknUSY>.

Developed by:

