



Media Release

State Water Board celebrates over 100 water system consolidations since 2019

Merging systems has secured safe drinking water for 90,000 people

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THERMAL, CA—Marking the completion of over 100 consolidations that have given 90,000 Californians reliable access to safe drinking water, the State Water Resources Control Board is leading a celebration today at Riverside County’s Westside Elementary, one of many places across the state that has benefited from consolidation. The State Water Board is joined by U.S. EPA Region 9, the Coachella Valley Water District, the Coachella Valley Unified School District, the [SAFER Advisory Group](#) and elected officials.

Before its consolidation into the Coachella Valley Water District, Westside Elementary relied on contaminated well water. This consolidation, and many others throughout the state, are made possible by the State Water Board’s [Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience \(SAFER\)](#) drinking water program, established after Governor Newsom signed SB 200 in 2019. The SAFER program focuses on consolidating small, at-risk or failing water systems—which are 20% more likely to serve disadvantaged communities and communities of color—into larger, higher capacity systems. Westside Elementary serves about 350 K-6 students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

“Through our collective efforts, we have demonstrated that consolidations are sustainable, win-win solutions to drinking water problems,” said State Water Board Chair E. Joaquin Esquivel. “Today, we celebrate the fact that pipelines are connecting more communities to safe and affordable drinking water, especially those where discrimination and disinvestment have created barriers to access.”

Westside Elementary School’s consolidation was fully funded with over \$815,000 in grants from SAFER, \$446,000 of which came from the [Drinking Water State Revolving Fund](#), a federal-state assistance program for infrastructure projects.

“Building an equitable, resilient future is our charge, and partnerships such as these, boosted by support from President Biden’s Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, will help us get there,” said U.S. EPA Pacific Southwest Regional Administrator Martha Guzman. “While serious work is still ahead of us, we recognize the significant progress made by state, local and federal partners to ensure historically underserved communities have access to the same basic safe drinking water services as most Americans do.”



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD

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Several additional consolidations are underway in the Eastern Coachella Valley. For example, the Coachella Valley Water District has launched two [regionalization](#) projects that will merge at least 16 small water systems in total, benefiting three disadvantaged communities. The water district also heads the Disadvantaged Communities Infrastructure Task Force and has developed a master plan, which identifies 75 small water systems for future consolidation.

“We recognize that consolidations are the most effective path to assuring safe drinking water for Eastern Coachella Valley residents,” said Castulo Estrada, board vice president for the water district and member of the SAFER Advisory Group. “The scale, speed, and success of these projects across the state and here at home would not have been possible without the SAFER program’s technical and funding support. We will continue to prioritize support for small water systems and look forward to continued collaboration with our local, state, and federal partners to secure additional funding for future projects that advance California’s Human Right to Water.”

More than 40,000 Californians in disadvantaged communities now receive safe drinking water because of consolidations. About half of systems currently going through the consolidation process (126 out of 252) at least partially serve disadvantaged communities and schoolchildren.

“Securing state investments for consolidation projects has allowed us to tackle longstanding safe drinking water infrastructure disparities in our rural communities. It is incredible to return to Westside Elementary School with Chair Esquivel to celebrate this safe drinking water milestone at the location where we pledged our commitment and partnership when advancing the legislation that created this funding tool,” said Assemblymember Eduardo Garcia, co-author of SB 200.

Since 2019, SAFER has provided \$620 million in grants for drinking water projects in disadvantaged communities; in that time access to safe drinking water has improved for close to 2 million Californians.

The State Water Board’s mission is to preserve, enhance and restore the quality of California’s water resources and drinking water for the protection of the environment, public health, and all beneficial uses, and to ensure proper resource allocation and efficient use for the benefit of present and future generations.



The SAFER Program includes projects funded by the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund, which is part of California Climate Investments, a statewide initiative that puts billions of Cap-and-Trade dollars to work reducing greenhouse gas emissions, strengthening the economy, and improving public health and the environment—particularly in disadvantaged communities.



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