



# Fact Sheet

## **Policy to Implement SAFER Drinking Water Program Puts Emphasis on Viable Solutions for Vulnerable Communities**

### **Overview**

Gov. Gavin Newsom has made safe and affordable drinking water one of the top priorities of his administration and envisioned a 10-year timeline to address the plight of Californians who struggle to access quality drinking water. Signed into law on [July 24, 2019](#), SB 200, the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund, sets in motion the legal structure to remedy past failures, address current shortcomings and bring true environmental justice to all Californians. The commitment is straightforward – provide safe water to drink, cook and bathe for an estimated 1 million people in disadvantaged communities throughout the state,

[SB 200](#) is the plan, complete with short-term solutions like supplying replacement water and such long-term solutions as upgrading water systems and building the kind of technical and managerial capability that helps failing systems become safe, efficient and sustainable.

The State Water Board administers the [Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund](#) through its Division of Financial Assistance; the Division of Drinking Water implements the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Act.

What follows are details that [summarize and explain the policy](#) that will develop the Fund Expenditure in the months and years to come.

### **How will these vulnerable water systems and disadvantaged communities be identified?**

More than 300 communities and thousands of domestic well users throughout the state lack safe drinking water because of contamination by arsenic, nitrates and other chemicals. Many other communities served by small drinking water systems are also vulnerable to water quality violations and lack the financial capacity to build, operate and maintain necessary treatment facilities. Some water quality issues are naturally occurring, such as certain cases of arsenic-tainted water.

The policy will do several things to address this, including:

- Define key terms and metrics
- Describe how proposed remedies will be identified, evaluated and prioritized
- Establish a petition process for disadvantaged communities wishing to be considered for consolidation with another water system



- Include a public hearing requirement

## **What is the role of the SAFER Advisory Group?**

The [Advisory Group](#) is statutorily mandated in SB 200. Beginning in the first quarter of 2020, the [Advisory Group](#) will meet quarterly in rotating locations throughout California and will provide input into the development of this Policy, the fund expenditure plan, and overall implementation of the Fund.

## **How will water systems needing solutions be assessed and prioritized?**

Water systems will be identified in the following manner:

- Public water systems currently in violation of one or more federal or state primary drinking water standard with an enforcement action taken; systems that fail to meet primary or secondary drinking water standards; or systems that fail to provide a pure and wholesome drinking water supply
- Public water systems deemed at risk using criteria in the Drinking Water Needs Assessment
- Review of a map of aquifers (groundwater) that are at high risk of containing contaminants that exceed safe drinking water standards and that are likely to be used as a source for drinking water
- Testing of domestic wells serving low-income households
- Water systems that must charge rates above an affordability threshold established by the State Water Board

Solutions for at-risk or failing water systems will be prioritized using the following risk categories:

- Immediate health risk
- Untreated or at-risk water sources
- Chronic compliance or water shortage issues

Solutions will then be prioritized within each of the three risk categories, with considerations focusing on cost effectiveness, readiness of funding recipients to proceed, and the pursuit of long-term, sustainable solutions. Based on the needs assessment, the Division of Financial Assistance will provide grant funding to technical assistance providers and community outreach organizations to assist with identifying solutions and prioritizing water systems.

## **What is the Fund Expenditure Plan?**

Because a wide range of projects are eligible for funding, the fund expenditure plan will identify eligible projects, activities and costs. A Fund Solution List will be developed in connection with the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Program's annual Intended

Use Plan. This list will include systems currently in violation, as well as at-risk systems, with solutions in prioritized order. The [Office of Sustainable Water Solutions](#) will continue to update progress in this area.

Funding will be mainly grants, with some loans available to incentivize consolidations or refinance debt at a more favorable rate.

## **How will the public know if the program is succeeding?**

Three metrics will be used to measure the success of the program:

- The number of communities and schools served with interim sources of safe drinking water (including bottled water, hauled water and filling stations)
- The number of communities and schools that have preliminary planning assistance projects completed
- The number of communities and schools that have long-term solutions completed (i.e. consolidation agreements, construction funding agreements or water systems that have returned to compliance)

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