



Media Release

Launch of Kettleman City's New Water Treatment Facility Makes Arsenic Struggle a Thing of the Past

Ribbon Cutting Ceremony Marks New Era For Community

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KETTLEMAN CITY – Long plagued by contaminated groundwater, residents of this farm worker community in the San Joaquin Valley will soon be enjoying safe drinking water straight from their own taps thanks to a new \$11 million water treatment plant built with state and federal funds.

Residents, community leaders, environmental justice groups, along with local and state officials, attended a ribbon-cutting ceremony today at the plant, which will deliver safe drinking water to more than 1,500 residents. For years, the community has relied on delivery of replacement drinking water.

“Like too many disadvantaged communities across California, Kettleman City has struggled for too long without access to safe, affordable drinking water,” said E. Joaquin Esquivel, chair of the State Water Board. “The residents of Kettleman City deserve credit for advocating for this project, and we’re excited to help bring it to fruition.”

The [State Water Resources Control Board](#), Kettleman City Community Services District (CSD), [Self-Help Enterprises](#) and [Kings County](#) worked with concerned community members to address unsafe levels of arsenic in the groundwater supply wells and bring residents safe drinking water.

“It’s a great thing and it’s long overdue,” said Maricela Mares-Alatorre with Greenaction. “Activists in Kettleman City have called for clean water for many, many years. This is a real victory and we’re very excited.”

Concerns about arsenic contamination surfaced in 2006 when the health threshold – called a maximum contaminant level (MCL) – was lowered from 50 micrograms per liter (ug/l) to 10 ug/L. Lowering the MCL led to the drinking water supply wells being out of compliance. As a result, residents have relied for years on the delivery of replacement drinking water until the community could be connected to a permanent, safe water source.

By engaging with community residents, the State Water Board determined that bypassing local groundwater to use treated surface water was the best solution to secure long-term safe and



sustainable drinking water supplies. The water treatment plant takes water directly from the Central Valley Project (California Aqueduct) and treats it before delivering it to hundreds of homes and small businesses in the area.

“We have been waiting for this for about 10 years, and right now everyone is so excited to get clean water delivered to us,” said Rosa Maldonado, office manager at the Kettleman City Community Services District. “We’ve had many people come by the office and tell us how excited they are. This is a farm laborer community. If the state wasn’t able to help us, there is no way we would have been able to do this project ourselves.”

Kettleman City, located along Highway 41 just north of the intersection of Interstate 5, has 350 service connections. Many small water districts in low-income areas like Kettleman City face similar hurdles - contaminated drinking water, outdated or inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient funds to upgrade water treatment facilities.

While the new water treatment plant is operational, a change from groundwater to surface water can cause disruption in the distribution piping and adversely impact water quality. Accordingly, the Kettleman City CSD is testing the system to ensure no disruption is occurring. Testing will continue into the first quarter of 2020, or until the testing confirms the water is meeting drinking water standards. In the interim, the community will continue using bottled water.

The State Water Board awarded an \$8.5 million grant for construction of the new surface water treatment plant. The U.S. Department of Agriculture also provided \$2.5 million in grant funding for the \$11 million project.

In addition to the construction funding, the District received \$539,620 in emergency grant funding from the State Water Board for the purchase and delivery of bottled water to residential customers.

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