



# Media Release

## **Needles celebrates completion of new, state-funded drinking water system**

### ***\$14 million SAFER grant secures safe drinking water for severely disadvantaged community***

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**NEEDLES, CA** – Today, after years of struggling with poor water quality and aging facilities, the city of [Needles](#) in eastern San Bernardino County celebrated the completion of a new water system that meets all state and federal standards and ensures reliable access to safe drinking water for its 5,000 residents.

The State Water Resources Control Board fully funded the planning and construction of Needles's new water system through a \$14 million grant from its [Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience \(SAFER\)](#) drinking water program. The program was launched after Gov. Gavin Newsom signed SB 200 in 2019, establishing funding for drinking water projects through the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund.

Since the SAFER program began, the State Water Board has distributed over \$1 billion in grants for drinking water projects in disadvantaged communities, and the number of Californians without safe drinking water has been reduced by half, from 1.6 million to about 800,000 people. SAFER's progress toward achieving safe drinking water for all Californians advances Gov. Gavin Newsom's [build more, faster agenda](#) to deliver infrastructure upgrades across the state.

In the case of Needles, the city sought help from the State Water Board after a burst pipe and lightning strike caused its 80-year-old water system, already contending with contamination issues, to fail completely in 2020.

"Needles's water outage presented us with a particularly difficult and urgent challenge, especially when considering that temperatures in the area can reach 120 degrees," said Nichole Morgan, member of the State Water Resources Control Board, during today's ceremony. "But helping communities in need is what we are here for. Thanks to the flexibility of our SAFER program, we were able to pay for immediate repairs to the prior system as a short-term fix, then help the city define its long-term needs, apply for and receive a grant for an entirely new system.

"The city was a wonderful partner throughout this process, working diligently to secure reliable access to safe drinking water for its residents. Now the community has drinking



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water infrastructure they can count on to meet their needs and the challenges of California’s hotter and drier climate in the years to come.”

Needles’s experience illustrates the challenges that small, rural disadvantaged communities often face to providing safe drinking water. With a median household income of \$40,000, the city was reluctant to raise water rates to pay for improvements to its prior water system, which fell into disrepair over time. Among other issues, the system became contaminated with iron and manganese. [Consolidation](#) with a neighboring, more robust water system, which the board recommends for many small towns struggling to provide safe drinking water, was not possible due to the town’s distance from other utilities. Ultimately, only major multiphase improvements — including booster station replacements, pipeline upgrades, backup generators and a new, centralized treatment facility — could ensure safe drinking water for the community.

“This project represents more than a milestone — it’s a generational investment in the future of Needles,” said Needles City Manager Patrick Martinez. “The \$14.3 million SAFER grant provided a critical opportunity to turn long-standing infrastructure challenges into a model of resilience and sustainability. In strong partnership with the State Water Resources Control Board, we are restoring public confidence, strengthening regional capacity, and positioning our community for long-term economic growth. This is the kind of forward-looking, outcomes-driven investment California needs, and the City Council is proud to help secure a stable, reliable water future for the residents of Needles.”

Today, 98% of Californians are served by water systems that consistently meet state and federal drinking water standards. Through the SAFER program, the board works to establish access to safe drinking water for the remaining 2% of Californians who predominantly reside in disadvantaged communities and communities of color with drinking water contamination and aging infrastructure. SAFER leverages the board’s regulatory authorities and funding from the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund, [Propositions 1, 68](#) and [84](#), the [Drinking Water State Revolving Fund](#), and other sources to support strategies to develop and implement sustainable solutions for these communities and communities at risk of losing access to safe drinking water.

*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.