

# SAFER Drinking Water Advisory Group Meeting #2

Meeting Notes | June 26, 2025

## Overview

The Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) Advisory Group participated in the second quarterly Advisory Group meeting of the year. The presentations included the results of the 2025 drinking water needs assessment, success story on consolidations, SAFER program accomplishments, updates on metrics, and announcements.

## 2025 Drinking Water Needs Assessment Results

Waterboards staff provided a presentation on the results of the 2025 Drinking Water Needs Assessment.

- Advisory Group member inquired about SB 1188 and its requirements related to technical, managerial, and financial standards and guidelines. They expressed the understanding that, upon a system's designation as a community water system, the drinking water standards would then apply.
  - Staff responded that the approach covers all water systems and aims to refine the technical, managerial, and financial standards to compile meaningful data in the long term.
- Advisory Group member inquired about the next steps for this report including a presentation to the board or other action.
  - Staff noted that because there was no major change, there would not be extensive media coverage. Instead, the results will be shared on their usual website, and they will inform the fund expenditure plan to determine the allocations and funding.
- Advisory Group member inquired about an analysis on Prop 218, which requires systems to increase their rates to meet state standards, potentially facing opposition from residents.
- Advisory Group member asked about the progress of including large water systems in the needs assessment and why it has not been brought up, noting that understanding the role and size of influencing factors would simplify the analysis.
  - Staff responded that the risks for larger systems differ from those for smaller systems. The technical, managerial, and financial effort aims to gather better data on these risks and to understand the factors that contribute to them.
- Advisory Group member noted that small systems with 300 to 500 connections have different standards compared to larger systems with 3,500 connections.

## Success Story: Consolidations

- Advisory Group member inquired whether the large system requires the small systems to come up to their standards.

- Staff responded that larger water systems often require smaller systems to meet their standards, potentially needing capital improvements. Consolidation efforts can sometimes be straightforward but may involve significant infrastructure upgrades to comply with updated standards.
- Advisory Group member asked what should small water system or domestic well residents expect in regard to costs and/or savings if consolidated?
  - Staff responded from Porterville's viewpoint, adopting water connection fees helps reinvest in the community, but sometimes lacks enough source capacity for projects, requiring an engineering analysis. Community sentiment is also considered on a case-by-case basis.
- Advisory Group member highlighted the need for examples from other communities to help visualize future scenarios.
  - Staff suggested reaching out to the SAFER email for coordinated communication and relevant examples from neighboring communities with the Division of Drinking Water Engagement Team.
- Advisory Group member asked if consolidations with the City of Porterville will result in the dissolution of existing water entities.
  - Staff affirmed that they would dissolve their water entities and become direct customers of the city.
  - Staff commented that costs and logistics of new water projects can be challenging. The State Water Board collaborates with the city to develop solutions for reducing costs for newly added residents.
- Advisory Group member inquired if any of the consolidation efforts were mandatory and if the City of Porterville put any funding forth.
  - Staff responded that the consolidations were not mandatory. The city showed interest over time as the project plans became more defined, with pre-planning and water master plan work contributing to the project's success.
- Advisory Group member mentioned the success of the Akin project, which included a temporary interim solution funded ahead of the full effort. He inquired about the funding mechanisms for that quick solution.
  - Staff responded unsure if there was an urgent drinking water matter, because the issue dealt with a system that was on a boil water notice and had bacteriological contamination.
- Advisory Group member asked if extra-territorial or out-of-service agreements require commitment to not contest future annexations.
  - Staff responded that that the willingness to participate in the project and to concede can change when communities are largely out of water, indicating that consolidations can bring certain concerns.
- Advisory Group member inquired about lessons-learned for future well consolidations.

- Staff emphasized the large engagement from both the community group and the city's side, which created a strict project management framework and facilitated effective communication and real-time problem-solving.
- Advisory Group member emphasized their involvement with SAFER since its inception and would like to see a solution for the community in Lanare, when the nearby community is not open to a dialog.
- Advisory Group member inquired if consolidation example also included wastewater.
  - Staff mentioned that the consolidation was only for drinking water.
- Advisory Group member highlighted the need to address the transition from surface to groundwater for three communities facing similar contamination issues and keeping it accessible. The Advisory Group member would like to know if there are funding opportunities.
- Advisory Group member shared that their community is on the path to consolidation and the problem is the cost. The Advisory Group member would like to know if changes can be made on the limits per connection for communities that depend on domestic wells and communities that have been historically underinvested.

### SAFER Accomplishments and Quarterly Updates on Metrics

- Advisory Group member inquired is that metric or rubric for stages of the project are available to the public for technical assistance providers to speak the same language.
  - Staff responded that they are moving in that direction, but it is not yet public.
- Advisory Group member asked if an active work plan can serve as a corrective action plan given the delay corrective action plans caused on projects.
  - Staff mentioned that it is certainly a possibility.
- Advisory Group member asked about metrics used for systems that do not come back into compliance.
  - Staff responded that the graphs are an imperfect way to show how long it takes for systems to come back into compliance.
- Advisory Group member referred to a current consolidation project that has the contaminant 1,2,3, - Trichloropropane (1,2,3- TCP) and inquired if they can apply for emergent contaminants funding.
  - Staff mentioned that 1,2,3-TCP is an emerging contaminant under their federal funding. They need to understand more of the project details to find the best funding source for that project.
- Advisory Group member seek clarification on the consolidations showing that most systems were not at risk or were not assessed.
  - Staff confirmed.
- Advisory Group member inquired about SAFER Goal #2 and asked if there were any common characteristics about the systems that were taking the longest to come into compliance, given the significant number of systems out of compliance.

- Staff responded that there is data being tracked and quantified in a meaningful way to reduce obstacles. The most correlation is the size of the system.
- Advisory Group member inquired about metrics for domestic well communities and whether this will be discussed at the July SAFER fund expenditure plan meeting.
  - Staff shared that more information will be provided about the support for domestic wells and state smalls, along with future proposals.
- Advisory Group member inquired about how the Division of Drinking Water (DDW) ensures systems come back to compliance more quickly.
  - Staff shared a number of methods that can bring a system back into compliance including but not limited to a compliance order, directives on public notification, ongoing sampling, corrective action plans, and escalated enforcement.
- Advisory Group member inquired about how involved the tribal communities are; they understand they are in need of assistance as well.
  - Staff shared that tribal water systems are regulated by the US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). There are many federal funding gaps where the SAFER program has been able to fill in. Tribal water systems that are failing have been identified in an attempt to support. Support has been provided through planning assistance, operations and maintenance. A presentation on these efforts can be provided in the future.
- Advisory Group member inquired about how much support is being provided to domestic well owners if there are income thresholds in place. What happens when someone barely meets the income threshold and no longer qualifies. Some folks barely go over the limit and still require assistance.
  - Staff respond that the workshop planned in a few weeks will provide a lot of information on resources for domestic wells solutions.
- Advisory Group member inquired if Community Service Districts and Mutual Water Districts are responsible for the statistics collected by Water Boards.
  - Staff shared that the data shared is supplied by laboratories and staff tracking their own projects and some comes from community service districts and mutual water districts. Engagement varies.
- Staff shared that the Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs will be hired for a position to help coordinate the domestic well efforts.

### Advisory Group member Announcements

- Advisory Group member Parry Klassen discussed their domestic well testing program, which expanded from Modesto-Turlock Basin to five other basins, from Madera County to Yolo County. They sent 1847 applications and analyzed 1092 wells. Besides nitrates, they are finding contaminants like 1,2,3- TCP (18%), and uranium (36%) in many wells. There are concerns about publicly reporting to [GEO tracker](#), the Water Boards' data management system, which limits people from further participating.

- Staff inquired if there was a push back on tenant, landlord, or owner-occupied residences.
- Advisory Group member affirmed that push back is seen across the board.
- Advisory Group member Jim Sullivan emphasized the importance of confidentiality when collecting data and suggested consulting lawyers for solutions, such as using broader geographic locations instead of specific addresses. He also inquired about the program's funding model for a nitrate program.
  - Advisory Group Member responded that the nitrate program is funded by all discharge permit holders of the agricultural industry, dairy, wine composting facilities, etc.

Advisory Group member Angela Islas raised concerns about the impact of immigration raids on a Tulare County outreach program and would like to hear an update on Stantec' outreach efforts and how the pilot program is working to support Technical Assistance providers and communities.

### Public Comment

Bethany Radar is a PhD Student at Oregon State University and their dissertation is focused on a program evaluation for SAFER.

- Many SAFER materials references funding since 2017, but SAFER (SB 200) did not exactly exist until 2019. I know the failing list began in 2017, and I believe the Drinking Water Needs Assessment (DWNA) process began in 2019 with the first Needs Assessment being published in 2021. Can you explain generally where the funding came from in 2017 and 2018 if it was not SAFER funding and why it's included in SAFER datasets and other materials since it pre-dates SAFER?
- The SAFER Dashboard reports Funding Since 2017 for each of the Risk Categories - totaling \$3,211,336,798. But the 2025 (2024) DWNA reports "As of December 31, 2024 (April 2024) --nearly six (five) years into the SAFER program-- the SWB has awarded over \$900M (\$831M) in drinking water grants to Disadvantaged Communities (DACs) across California." I do note the qualifier of DAC in the DWNA numbers reported, but I believe SB200 specifically requires that the funds be used for DACs, so why the discrepancy.
  - Staff recommend connecting Bethany with a SAFER staff to address her inquiries.

### Water Board Next Steps

- Special Meeting to discuss Draft Fund Expenditure Plan is tentative July 17, 2025.

### Advisory Group Attendance (P= present, A= absent)

Norma I. Amezcua (P)	Angela Islas (P)	Edwin Alonzo (A)
Juan Cano (P)	Parry Klassen (P)	Stephanie Anagnoson (P)
Irene Cacho (P)	Michael Knight (A)	Don James (A)

Advisory Group Attendance (P= present, A= absent) cont.

Kristin Dobbin (P)	Erick Orellana (P)	Rami Kahlon (P)
Tequita Jefferson (A)	Adam J. Rausch (P)	Shannon Murphy (P)
Soren Nelson (A)	Isabel Solorio (P)	
Silverio Pérez (P)	James Sullivan (P)	

State Water Board Attendance

**Division of Drinking Water:** Chad Fischer, Dan Wang

**Division of Financial Assistance:** Jeff Wetzel, Kristyn Abhold

**Office of Public Engagement, Equity and Tribal Affairs:** Adriana Renteria, Manuel Leon, Mandy Roman, Alma López

**Office of Chief Counsel:** Anthony Austin, Kim Niemeyer