

News Release



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CDPH Approves \$250,000 for Willits Water Supply CDCR and CAL FIRE Provide Additional Resources

SACRAMENTO - As several California communities face severe water shortages due to the drought, CAL FIRE, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) and the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) are assisting the city of Willits, in Mendocino County, with the installation of an emergency water pipe.



The CDPH Drinking Water Program today approved emergency funding of \$250,000 to the city of Willits. This water system has been identified as vulnerable to losing its capacity to deliver safe drinking water due to drought conditions in California.

The emergency funds will be specifically used to assist with the purchase and installation of pipe to transport well water to connect with the city's existing distribution system, a new well pump, fencing, disinfection of the well and well replacement. This will provide the people of Willits with at least a minimal supply of clean water to maintain emergency water supplies.

"This drought has impacted all of California. This is one example of a coordinated effort bringing resolution to a severely impacted community. CDPH continues to survey water systems statewide for impact of the drought," said Dr. Ron Chapman, CDPH director and state health officer. "Our Drinking Water Program is offering technical assistance to drinking water systems and is exploring possible solutions for those most vulnerable."

Since January, CAL FIRE and CDCR have been assisting the city's water department to install several miles of piping to tie two wells to a proposed emergency water treatment facility. CAL FIRE has supplied the city with several inmate hand crews, each comprised of a CAL FIRE captain and approximately 15 low-level inmates from CDCR to provide the city with a large emergency workforce.

(more)

“The drought has not only led to an increase in wildfires, but has left some communities with reduced drinking water supplies,” said Unit Chief Chris Rowney, CAL FIRE Mendocino Unit. “When our inmate firefighting hand crews are not assigned to wildfires, we have them working on brush clearance or other community service projects, so we are glad we can assist the city of Willits in its time of need.”

The hand crews assigned to the project are stationed at the Chamberlain Creek Conservation Camp in Fort Bragg. The camp is one of 39 statewide camps that are operated jointly by CAL FIRE and CDCR. The camp’s primary mission is to provide fire crews for fire suppression. Additionally, the inmates provide a workforce for conservation and community service projects in the local area.

With California facing its driest year on record, Governor Brown declared a drought State of Emergency last month and directed state officials to take all necessary actions to prepare for water shortages. Governor Brown spoke with President Obama last week about crucial federal support during the ongoing drought, and the state continues to work with federal partners to ensure a coordinated drought response.

The Department of General Services is leading water conservation efforts in state facilities, and the Department of Transportation is cutting water usage along California’s roadways by 50 percent. In January, the state took action to conserve water in numerous Northern California reservoirs to meet minimum needs for operations that impact the environment and the economy. Recently the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the California Fish and Game Commission restricted fishing on some waterways due to low water flows worsened by the drought. Last month, CAL FIRE hired 125 additional firefighters to help address the increased fire threat due to drought conditions, the California Department of Public Health identified and offered assistance to communities at risk of severe drinking water shortages and the California Department of Food and Agriculture launched a drought website to help farmers, ranchers and farmworkers find resources and assistance programs that may be available to them during the drought. Also last month, the California Natural Resources Agency, the California Environmental Protection Agency and CDFA released the California Water Action Plan, which will guide state efforts to enhance water supply reliability, restore damaged and destroyed ecosystems and improve the resilience of our infrastructure.

Governor Brown has called on all Californians to voluntarily reduce their water usage by 20 percent, and the Save Our Water campaign launched four public service announcements encouraging residents to conserve. Last December, the Governor formed a Drought Task Force to review expected water allocations and California’s preparedness for water scarcity. In May 2013, Governor Brown issued an Executive Order to direct state water officials to expedite the review and processing of voluntary transfers of water and water rights.

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