

SAN LUCAS POTABLE WATER SUBSIDY PROGRAM

Background:

San Lucas is an unincorporated town located in the southern region of the County of Monterey (“San Lucas”). The San Lucas Water District (“District”) operates the local water system which serves local residences, the San Lucas School, Post Office, and local businesses within the District’s service area. The District conducted testing of the drinking water, and such testing has shown that since January 2011, the drinking water is contaminated with nitrates at levels above the national and state standards of 45 mg/l (or 45 parts per million (ppm)).

High levels of nitrate in drinking water are associated with adverse health effects. According to the Monterey County Health Department (“Health Department”), excessive nitrates in drinking water can interfere with the oxygen-carrying capacity of the blood, a condition called methemoglobinemia (“blue baby” syndrome). Infants under six months of age are at greatest risk of methemoglobinemia. Toxic effects occur when bacteria in the infant stomach convert nitrate to more toxic nitrite. When nitrite enters the bloodstream, it interferes with the body’s ability to carry oxygen to body tissues. Symptoms include shortness of breath and blueness of the skin around the eyes and mouth. Infants with these symptoms need immediate medical care since the condition can lead to coma and eventually death. According to the Health Department, pregnant women are at risk for developing the symptoms of methemoglobinemia, since during pregnancy methemoglobin levels increase to a higher than normal range. Furthermore, according to the Federal Environmental Protection Agency, long-term exposure to water with high nitrate levels may cause diuresis (excessive urination) and hemorrhaging of the spleen.

In March 2011 and in July 2011 the Health Department issued notification to the District that the drinking water of the District was a health hazard for infants younger than six months and for pregnant women and ordered the use of bottled water for drinking and cooking purposes for all persons on the District system.

On or about May 23, 2011, the Environmental Health Bureau of the Health Department (“Health Bureau”) issued Compliance Order No. 11-006, finding that the nitrate level in the District’s water supply exceeded the national and state standards and ordering the District to find an acceptable permanent water source for domestic water supply. The nitrate levels remain above national and state standards, and there is no immediate acceptable permanent water source for domestic water supply. Boiling of water contaminated with nitrates increases the concentration of nitrates. Therefore, boiling does not provide a short-term solution to the nitrate contamination of the drinking water of the District.

Problem:

Nitrate contamination of the District’s water supply has created a health and safety hazard, and constitutes a potential public health threat.

Proposed Emergency Interim Solution and Program Scope:

The Monterey County Board of Supervisors proposes a voluntary program to subsidize the cost of potable water for customers of the District. The County proposes this program for three (3) months. This program will be implemented to allow the District time to develop a strategy to provide its customers potable water.

Specific Eligibility Requirements and Processing Information:

1. Eligibility is restricted to domestic use customers of the District, including the San Lucas School, and potable water will be supplied to such customers based upon a list provided by the District.
2. Eligible customers will receive 25 gallons of potable water per residence per week and the San Lucas School will receive 100 gallons per week. The number of gallons delivered per residence may change as directed by Environmental Health Bureau staff.
3. Environmental Health Bureau staff may implement other procedures as necessary to implement the Program.