

SAFER Drinking Water Advisory Group Meeting #4

Meeting Notes | December 11, 2025

Overview

The Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) Advisory Group held its fourth and final quarterly meeting of the year. The agenda included a discussion on domestic wells led by the Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs and the Division of Drinking Water, followed by quarterly program updates from the Division of Drinking Water, Division of Financial Assistance, and Office of Legislative Affairs. Advisory Group members also received a series of presentations on Central Coast drinking water projects, participated in the Central Coast Drinking Water Tour, and concluded the meeting with a recognition of Advisory Group members completing their terms.

Domestic Wells Discussion

The discussion focused on strategies to effectively engage domestic well users, particularly those in culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and how to better align SAFER efforts with existing domestic well programs to reduce duplication and improve outcomes. Advisory Group members shared the following recommendations:

- Prioritize domestic well projects and consolidations.
 - Expanding Technical Assistance could help stabilize water systems.
- Identify the most successful water programs and projects and attempt to develop a gold standard. For example, efforts to lower the entry barrier for applying for technical assistance were commendable. Replicate that approach with other programs and services.
- Develop guidelines for Groundwater Sustainability Agencies, management zones, mitigation projects, counties, and State and Regional Water Boards to improve collaboration, coordination, organized communication, consistency in regulations, streamlined applications, and communication with community to ensure equitable treatment for all.
- Develop an outreach strategy for domestic well owners to build trust and educate the community on well testing, understanding results, the effects of contaminated water, and available funding and host a well testing education summit.
- Identify and uplift existing models that work and consolidate resources and efforts to simplify processes for residents.
- Address language barriers for the community's full participation. Empathize with residents and actively support those who may be hesitant or unable to attend meetings.
- Advisory Group can support in finding community contacts once domestic well strategy is developed.
- Advance legislation or guidance to strengthen well permitting standards and better protect domestic wells, ensuring permits are issued appropriately and costs are shared in proportion to impacts caused. Develop a clearing house to pool knowledge, direct community to resources and share best practices.

SAFER Program Goals: Quarterly Updates on Metrics

The Division of Drinking Water, Division of Financial Assistance, and Office of Legislative Affairs provided quarterly updates on key program metrics, an update on the Final Fund Expenditure Plan for Fiscal Year

2025-2026, and on 2025 drinking water legislation. Their updates focused on current progress, emerging issues, and upcoming priorities impacting SAFER-related work.

- Advisory Group member inquired if Riverview Elementary, the school where Gavin Newsom launched the SAFER program, has received SAFER drinking water and provided with a sustainable solution?
 - Staff will follow up
- Advisory Group member inquired if domestic wells coming in and out of compliance are being tracked, just like community water systems.
 - Staff responded that domestic well assistance lacks the same framework as public water systems; while grant agreements have extensive reporting and tracking. There is data, but it is not tracked holistically like other water systems.
- Advisory Group member inquired about Senate Bill 131, trailer bill, AB 1207 and SB 840 (extending greenhouse gas funding and SAFER funding).
 - Staff will follow up on these bills since they are not on their portfolio

Presentations on Central Coast Drinking Water Tour

This portion of the meeting featured presentations on a range of Central Coast drinking water projects. Presenters highlighted key aspects of each project—such as the Central Coast Water Board's drinking water well testing and alternative water supply program, San Lucas, Gabilan Water Company, Country Meadows Road, Prunedale/Echo Valley School, Springfield Road, and McGinnis Road—and provided background on community needs and project progress. These updates offered a comprehensive look at ongoing efforts to improve drinking water access and quality across the Central Coast.

- Advisory Group member shared the significant collaboration happening with Stantec regarding nitrate levels in California. They anticipate certification for Point of Use/Point of Entry projects addressing high nitrate levels in affected communities by next year.
- Advisory Group member inquired about the grant that covered the main cost of the lateral extensions on the Gabilan Water Service Area.
 - Partly SAFER funding and another funding source.
- Advisory Group member inquired about how Community Water Center integrates residents into the projects successfully.
 - Change happens at the speed of trust. Community Water Center addresses the barriers, including language access and distrust of state agencies. Commitment from the state is essential to assure residents of its genuine concern. Discussions about projects should highlight their impact on people as well as infrastructure improvements.

Advisory Group Member Announcements

Advisory Group members shared brief announcements, highlighting updates, upcoming activities, and items of interest relevant to their communities and organizations.

- Advisory Group member Angela Islas: Working with the Perry Colony community in West Fresno County and Fresno County Public Works to explore consolidation options. Currently they are working with Black Water Engineering and going through the feasibility options and with Self-Help Enterprises on the engagement plan.
- Advisory Group member Stephanie Anagnoson: Madera County Groundwater Sustainability Agency adopted rules for domestic well mitigation.

- Advisory Group member Juan Cano: Working with Division of Financial Assistance to expand SAFER Technical Assistance program and sewer system projects.
- Advisory Group member Shannon Murphy: Working on a research project that would allow SAFER like programs to be rolled out to other states.

Public Comment

The meeting included a public comment period, providing time for community members to share input and feedback.

- Sean Abby, a Water Quality Specialist with Santa Cruz County, received a grant through the SAFER Program to support domestic wells and state small water systems with water quality issues. In partnership with the Central Coast Domestic Wells Program, led by Julia Dyer, the project exceeded outreach expectations by testing 186 wells. Due to contract limitations, only 5 of the 32 wells requiring services were addressed, and many homes were ineligible because their income exceeded program thresholds despite ongoing monitoring needs. The program aims to continue its efforts moving forward.

Central Coast Drinking Water Tour

Meeting attendees participated in a Central Coast drinking water tour, visiting two sites: Echo Valley School in Salinas, followed by McGinnis Road in Royal Oaks.

Water Board Next Steps

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

Norma I. Amezcua (P)	Angela Islas (P)	Edwin Alonzo (P)
Juan Cano (P)	Parry Klassen (P)	Stephanie Anagnoson (P)
Irene Cacho (P)	Michael Knight (P)	Don James (P)
Kristin Dobbin (P)	Erick Orellana (P)	Rami Kahlon (P)
Tequita Jefferson (P)	Adam J. Rausch (P)	Shannon Murphy (P)
Soren Nelson (P)	Isabel Solorio (P)	
Silverio Pérez (P)	James Sullivan (P)	

State Water Board Attendance

Board Members: Dorene D'Adomo, Laurel Firestone, Sean Maguire

Division of Drinking Water: Bryan Potter, Chad Fischer, Tara Ouitavon, Daniel Ocasio, Ileana Wald, David Zensius, Bryan Escamilla, Sheri Miller

Division of Financial Assistance: Jeff Wetzel, Otto Tang, Salem Alyafeai, James Garrett, Joe Karkoski, Karmina Padgett-Gonzalez

Office of Public Engagement, Equity and Tribal Affairs: Adriana Renteria, Amelia Nishimura, Manuel Leon, Mandy Roman, Lacey Carlson, Aaron Dickinson, Icelyn Yepez, Johannus Reinjders, Julia Glick, Alma López,

Office of Chief Counsel: Lauren Marshall, Samantha Ramadan, Anu Krishnaswamy

Office of Legislative Affairs: Amanda Simpson

Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board: Julia Dyer, James Bishop

Office of Enforcement: Hector Callejas

Office of Information Management and Analysis: Rafael Maestu