

SAFER Workshop 4/17 Needs ID Methodologies

State Water Board Identifies At-Risk Systems and Potential Solutions to Assist

The State Water Resources Control Board recently held a teleconference focused on the needs assessment the Board is conducting in collaboration with the UCLA Luskin Center, as well as state, institutional and non-profit partners. The SAFER Advisory Group provides the State Water Board with constructive advice and feedback on the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund Expenditure Plan required by SB 200.

The SAFER advisory group works to advise The Water Board on their identification of water systems that are vulnerable to water quality issues and their allocation of Greenhouse Gas Funds to resolve those issues. The Water Board's first round of needs analysis is being handled by the UCLA Luskin Center and is mainly seeking to identify water systems with less than 3,000 connections, with a focus on smaller community water systems, schools, and domestic or private well owners in order to align with the human right to water doctrine. CalMutuals is appreciative of the inclusion of many mutual water companies in the initial study. They relied on a broad framework of risk screening which balances a system's exposure to risk like contaminated water, and their vulnerability, determined by their sensitivity and adaptive capacity. Some of their specific metrics used to classify water systems include monitoring and reporting violations, the presence of a single groundwater source, the absence of individual meters, and location in Disadvantaged communities (DAC).

While the Luskin Center continues developing its first iteration of their needs analysis, they have laid out some of the improvements they would like to make in their second version in order to refine the analysis further and increase public awareness. The new needs analysis has several tools to update the rating system: the identification of further risk factor metrics, the setting of risk thresholds for the metrics, and the implementation of metric weighting. Some of the new factors to be considered in the second analysis include DWR's drought and water risk scoring, electronic annual reporting data and 30 additional factors including groundwater availability, precipitation, heat, fire and backup supply. The full list has not yet been presented, though it has been requested by the SAFER group. Also updated in version 2.0 is the creation of a tiered threshold categorization system; wherein the average of their risk factors creates one score that will fall either in the low, medium, or high risk areas as opposed to either being at-risk or not at risk. The tiered system aims to remove the binary ruling and more precisely define water systems' risk levels.

The Water Board's affordability screening, in addition to identifying the communities with the most need, is in place to ensure that water systems will be able to maintain themselves after receiving funding from the program. As we are looking towards sustainability, the study is looking to ensure that water systems have the technical, managerial and financial capacity to maintain a smoothly functioning system. In order to properly maintain the water system, the operators must set rates that will allow them to maintain their infrastructure and meet any increased costs after a project completion. The study will assess whether the average member of the community will be able to pay their bill and keep the system operational. Metrics like Median Household Income (HMI) and Hours at minimum wage evaluate the public's ability to pay.

The State Water Resources Control Board is collaborating with partner agencies in order to make decisions regarding the fund policy. The Department of Water Quality, as mandated by SB200, is working to create an aquifer risk map that will be used to help inform the fund expenditure plan when complete. The legislature has also directed the Department of Water Resources to identify the drought risk for rural communities including many small water suppliers and rural communities. Many of the members that

make up CalMutuals are located in small, disadvantaged or rural communities and we are very grateful for The Water Board's inclusion of those systems in their preliminary analysis.