

# Teviston, California without running water for several weeks, with no end in sight

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In early June, the water pump in the only functioning well in the rural town of Teviston, California broke down, leaving the community of nearly 1,000 residents without running water for the last several weeks. The lack of running water is particularly problematic as the temperature in California's Central Valley routinely exceeded 100 degrees Fahrenheit for much of June and will likely continue in the same condition for the rest of the summer.

Teviston is an unincorporated community located in Tulare County. The community's initial residents were black migrants from the Cotton Belt and Dust Bowl states in the 1930s. Today, the population is primarily composed of Latino farmworkers.

Frank Galaviz, one of the Teviston Community Service District's directors, told ABC 30 it is believed "that the well went down so low that sand started agitating down below, got into the pump and made it malfunction."

Teviston has now suffered from three well failures, including June's broken pump. The last failure was in November of 2017, when the community's well collapsed. As with many rural communities in California's Central Valley, there was no working back-up well in Teviston back in 2017 and this is still the case nearly four years later.

Due to the well's failure, the Teviston Community Service District is working with several organizations to help supply residents with water. Cases of bottled water and five-gallon jugs are being provided to residents while tanker trucks are hauling water from neighboring Porterville, which is just over twenty miles away, to fill Teviston's two water storage tanks.

Teviston residents are relying on these limited supplies of bottled water for basic necessities, including hydration, cooking, bathing, and even flushing toilets. According to Galaviz, residents are resorting to visiting family or friends in neighboring towns to be able to shower or wash clothes. Galaviz added that with the water that is being supplied, "it's just barely enough, and in some cases, not enough. Some families are larger than others."

Shelly Soriano, a Teviston resident, expressed frustration to the *Fresno Local Voice Times*, stating "you feel sick all the time, it is awful. You can't cool down, you can't take a proper shower, nothing." She added that her family is receiving five gallons of water every two weeks and it simply is not enough.

According to her, the amount of water she is receiving "comes out to, if you have a family of four, about a pitcher of water per person per day."

On top of the struggle of having enough water for her family, she needs to fill several large tanks of water three times a day to ensure that her livestock can survive. She also stated that she is concerned that many residents cannot escape the heat of the Central Valley since much of the community relies on evaporative coolers, colloquially known as "swamp coolers," to cool their homes, but these depend on water to function properly.

According to Galaviz, it may take several weeks to get the well's pump repaired since they are waiting on the proper parts required to be able to fix it. Galaviz is also concerned that the well may dry up due to the current drought California is experiencing.

A temporary pump has been installed in the well, which is providing some residents with enough water pressure to be able to flush their toilets. Martin Correa, Teviston's Water Board Director, told ABC 30 "it is not enough pressure from what we are usually used to getting, but our focus is to get water to the community and residents."

A new, modern well is in the process of being built in Teviston, but Galaviz estimates that it will not be completed until sometime in 2022 or 2023. During a conference, he advised that Teviston needs "the State Water Board to expedite our funding" for the well.

Back in 2017 when Teviston's well collapsed, the community received some state funding for emergency response and they partnered with Pixley, a nearby town, for water. Galaviz suggested that one possible solution for Teviston's water access problem is to incorporate the community with Pixley to access their water system.

Senate Bill 403, currently working its way through California's Legislature, would pave the way for the State Water Board to be able to consolidate communities that are at risk of losing consistent access to clean water, with the purpose of helping especially disadvantaged communities, like Teviston, that rely on at-risk wells.

With California's current drought, there is a significant risk that thousands of wells across the Central Valley will dry up. In

turn, this will disproportionately affect the working class Latino residents of the Valley as they typically rely on wells as their primary source of water. When California last experienced a drought, low-income Latinos were the most affected, especially in these rural farmworker communities.

In addition to the concerns regarding California's drought and the possibility of wells drying up, many wells across the state have also been affected by water contamination. In the Kern County community of Lamont, which is home to approximately 20,000 people, mostly Latino farmworkers, there are seven wells. The Lamont Public Utility District's general manager, Scott Taylor, reported that five of them are suffering contamination from 123-trichloropropane (TCP), which is a carcinogen, and one is nonfunctional.

According to the State Water Resources Control Board, \$130 million will be set aside annually through 2030 via the Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) program to "address funding gaps and provide solutions to water systems, especially those serving disadvantaged communities."

Darrin Polhemus, deputy director of the Board's Division of Drinking Water, explained, "state partner agencies, like the State Water Resources Control Board, stand ready to assist local agencies and counties as they address these emergencies while also working towards long-term solutions for communities like Teviston through its existing assistance programs."

Polhemus added, "Local agencies and counties need to prepare now for how they will handle any future emergency response to an immediate drinking water crisis and what resources they will use to meet immediate needs while state resources can be brought online to support."

However, according to Galaviz and Taylor, they have both encountered severe bureaucratic delays when working with the State Water Board. Taylor told Cal Matters, "the truth is that not only is the water not flowing, but neither is the funding. Especially for small agencies like mine, like the others, no funding is no water."

Back in May, California Governor Gavin Newsom proposed setting aside \$5.1 billion for drought preparedness, infrastructure, and response, with \$1.3 billion of that being specifically earmarked for drinking water and wastewater infrastructure, particularly for smaller and lower-income communities. Utterly insufficient to meet the need, much of this money will be funneled to private companies as a capitalist response to address the water crisis in California.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* stated nearly six years ago, "The refusal to seriously address this issue by capitalist governments, largely beholden to giant energy conglomerates, poses great dangers to the planet and mankind's survival." In the years since, the situation has not improved and actually has gotten even worse.

In 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) warned, "1 in 3 people globally do not have access to safe drinking water." They added, "2.2 billion people around the world do not have safely managed drinking water services, 4.2 billion people do not have safely managed sanitation services, and 3 billion lack basic handwashing facilities."

According to additional statistics published by the WHO in 2019, at least 2 billion people use a drinking water source contaminated with feces, such contaminated water can transmit diseases such as diarrhea, cholera, dysentery, typhoid, and polio, and it is estimated that contaminated drinking water causes more than 485,000 diarrheal deaths per year. It was estimated that by 2025, "half of the world's population will be living in water-stressed areas."

Water pollution is not a phenomenon that only affects underdeveloped countries, as the Flint water crisis has proven, and the lack of accessibility to clean water is affecting both developed and underdeveloped countries alike. The dearth of water access globally is being further exacerbated by climate change. Capitalism has shown that it is both incapable and unwilling to address such global problems.

Around the world, national and local governments have paid nothing but lip service to addressing the global water and climate change crises, while international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank have done nothing but facilitate the transfer of money to corporations that are looking to add to their bottom line while making false promises to "alleviate" these crises.

In 2015, the Socialist Equality Party asserted that "in opposition to the IMF, World Bank and every capitalist institution," the party "alone asserts that access to clean and free water is a basic social right." This perspective has been fully vindicated by events. In order to achieve this, the stranglehold of capitalism needs to be broken and an international socialist program must be implemented. This will allow for a truly international response that will ensure that the entire world is granted permanent access to clean drinking water and that global climate change is properly addressed and mitigated.



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