



# County of Santa Cruz



## HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DIVISION

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## Well Ordinance Update Setting – Individual Water System Protections

### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this summary document is to outline the factors that must be taken into account when evaluating the changes to requirements and protections for Individual Water Systems due to updates to Santa Cruz County Code Chapter 7.70 and 7.73.

### **Water Quality:**

- Currently, Public Community Water Systems are required to test for around 100 contaminants at the time of development and must test for over 70 contaminants on a regular basis. Based on the system location, other contaminants may be added.
- In Santa Cruz County, domestic wells are currently only required to test for the following contaminants with primary drinking water Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs)- bacteria, nitrate, total dissolved solids, chlorides, as well as iron and manganese which have secondary MCLs which affect color, odor, and taste.
- There are many contaminants, naturally occurring and/or resulting from human activities, that can impact the water quality in an IWS. For example, the County is known to have elevated levels of contaminants such as arsenic and hexavalent chromium (typically associated with the movie Erin Brockovich).
- Residences on an IWS are not typically required to do any testing after the completion of the well.
- This means that most of the over 8,000 households with an IWS are drinking water that has never had comprehensive testing, which may present a health risk.
- The update to SCCC 7.73 is addressing this through the requirement that all new and replacement wells intended to be used as an IWS get tested for the full common range of contaminants (known as Title-22) as well as any additional tests recommended by the County based on the location of the well. Treatment may be required for some exceedances, and in that case, the requirement for treatment would be recorded on the Deed.
- Additionally, there will be a time-of-sale requirement that any household receiving its water from an IWS must test for Title-22 contaminants, and that the results are provided to the buyer through the Disclosures, as well as to the County. No requirement for treatment is included, that is something the buyer can negotiate with the seller. The requirement is

waived for properties that have had comprehensive testing within three years of the sale date.

**Drought resilience/supply protection:**

- Climate change has altered the way water recharges local aquifers, a pattern that is expected to continue into the future.
- The geology of the County is extremely complex and some areas have a naturally limited supply of groundwater. Property owners and buyers may not be aware that their well is vulnerable to water shortages based on location.
- Senate Bill 552 includes requirements for drought response and planning on the part of Counties when it comes to domestic wells.
- Given the importance of a secure water supply for rural households, the update to SCCC 7.73 will require more extensive yield testing during well development in areas mapped as “Groundwater Concern Areas.”
- Additionally, yield testing will now be a requirement for homes relying on an IWS for water supply at time-of-sale. The results of this testing must be included in the Disclosures. No restrictions on sale will be placed on properties based on the results, but it may impact negotiations between buyer and seller.