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ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DIVISION

WELL DRILLER ADVISORY GROUP

MEETING NOTES

JULY 11, 2013

TAHOE ROOM, 202 MIRA LOMA DRIVE, OROVILLE

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**I. Preliminary Items**

**A. Call to Order**

The meeting began around 3:04 p.m.

**B. Attendance**

Industry: Ron Stilwell, David Moench, Steve Gwathney, John Riley.

Staff: Brad Banner, Elaine McSpadden, Charlotte Walters, Tom Loushine, Kristen McKillop, Christina Buck, Megan Herrenkohl (CSUC intern).

**II. Directions onto Remote Foothill Parcels**

Brad clarified that everybody had received a copy of the May 17, 2013 policy that was sent out requesting that clear directions or accompaniment to a well site be provided to staff for remote locations in the foothills. Charlotte stated that in recent weeks there have been extremely clear directions given, and she has driven right to most parcels. Precision Pump has created a directional sign, and will be adding David & Sons information to one side so both can utilize this for posting at parcels.

**III. Backflow Devices on Ag/Irrigation Wells**

Kristen outlined that the reason this topic was included on the agenda is because many EH staff throughout the state participate in a Water Well Technical Advisory Committee list serve. The subject circulated in that arena, and staff was curious about practices in Butte County. The group stated that it is not at all typical to install backflow prevention on wells at the time of drilling, in fact about 98% of wells are set up with air gap devices of some sort when the irrigation practices are initialized. Because land owners using chemical application in conjunction with irrigation, or chemigation, are heavily regulated on the chemical side through the Department of Pesticide Regulation and the Butte County Agricultural Commissioner, there is likely not a need for EH to become involved in this process.

**IV. Hydrologic Conditions Update**

Christina provided an update on Spring groundwater levels, runoff numbers and storage levels. The discussion centered on the fact that the percent of average numbers do not

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accurately reflect conditions that the driller's are seeing. The water table in the entire Durham area seems to have dropped about 20' this season from last. Christina asked that the driller's report their findings to Water and Resource Conservation so that they can track where the problematic wells are in order to make correlations with groundwater elevation measurements. The group did ask about how many large diameter wells are being drilled per year within the County, and Charlotte stepped out to run a report. In 2009, there were 25 wells, in 2010 there 15 wells, in 2011 there were 23 wells, in 2012 there were 24 wells, and to date this year there have been 15. That gives a rough five year average of 20 large diameter wells per year.

## V. **Burning Issues**

- A. The group asked if future meetings could be schedule in May and October to "book-end" the heavy drilling season. A 3:00-5:00 meeting time is still the preferred meeting time by most.
- B. It was requested by the group that Environmental Health do something to assist with the issue of well productivity tests being done by non-licensed, non-trained people. There are currently no regulatory requirements mandating who does these tests, or how, and there are many reported occurrences of homeowners purchasing a property that does not have the water yield they believed it did according to the report provided by the realtor. Brad stated that Environmental Health cannot get involved in the regulatory or civil issues, but that we can reach out to the real estate community and set up a training for realtors so they understand the type of testing that should be done, and the importance of having trained professionals doing the testing.
- C. Brad initiated a discussion about the Exploratory Well policy that was adopted by the Board of Supervisors in 2005. In recent weeks, there have been discussions with DDS and other Land Use permitting divisions about enforcement mechanisms on parcels illegally growing marijuana. It has been suggested that the Exploratory Wells can be drilled, but until the Legal Lot Determination process has been completed, the well must be capped. The group is not in support of this at all, in fact voted unanimously against the idea, and the following captures the major points of contention:
  - Requiring the capping of exploratory wells until parcel review will have a significant adverse impact on public health, safety, and the environment. Those who are carrying out the unpermitted agricultural activities requiring water will either uncap the wells and install pumps themselves or will draw surface water from nearby streams. Unpermitted use of surface water adversely impacts the environment and fisheries. Installation of well pumps by untrained and unlicensed individuals could result in contamination of the aquifer or creation of electrical hazards.
  - The current well ordinance is intended to protect public health. It is unfair to modify the well ordinance for an unrelated purpose (i.e. to restrict undesirable

agricultural activities) and in the process adversely impact the livelihood of well drillers.

VI. **Adjourn**

The group adjourned at 5:00 p.m.