

'Anything Possible' In Determining Water Yield

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Under questioning that resembled cross-examination in a courtroom, a spokesman for the U.S. Geological Survey Monday night admitted it was possible the "safe yield" in the Mid-County underground water basin was higher than stated in the department's latest report.

USGS District Chief Richard Boyd, speaking at the public hearing of the Soquel Creek County Water District Board, also pointed out that "anything was possible."

He added, "If you talk to 10 different people, you're going to get 10 different estimates on what the safe yield is."

Today, as the county Board of Supervisors was considering expansion of a well-drilling ban in mid-county, Boyd offered his department's services to come up with more information.

He said USGS would be willing to come up with a water level contour map that would tell the board where the upland recharge area of the aquifer begins. The engineer previously said there is no evidence that taking water from higher levels of the aquifer would add to the problem of saltwater intrusion along the coast.

After first defeating a motion by supervisors Dan Forbus and Wayne Moore to hold off a decision until June, the board then moved to continue the public hearing on the issue to April 7.

Monday night, Boyd reconfirmed his support of the USGS report conducted last year by hydrologist Ken Muir, which estimated the "safe yield" in the district's underground Purisima Formation at 4,400 acre feet. Because of that report, Soquel water directors three months ago placed a ban on new water connections.

Boyd, under the cross-examining, of sorts, by local water biologist Laurence Frommhagen, also admitted it was possible the "safe yield" was as high as 7,000 or 8,000 acre feet.

The current controversy began a few weeks ago when USGS Chief Hydrologist Jay P. Akers disputed Muir's estimate, saying the "safe yield" was in between 4,400 and a 10,000 acre feet estimate derived in a 1968 report.

When Frommhagen asked Boyd if Muir's estimate could be plus or minus some 50 percent, Boyd replied: "Actually anything is possible. It really isn't a fair question. The answer has to be yes. I think it would be

foolish for me or any other hydrologist to say 10,000 acre feet minus 1,000 or 2,000."

David Landino, a spokesman for the Associated Well Drilling Contractors of California, Central Coast Section, charged the district was working "on complete lack of knowledge on the basics of the district."

When Boyd disputed that, Landino maintained that the district did not know the structural relationships of various water level contours and "was working in a vacuum, not knowing where you're going."

Water Director Daniel Kriege answered, "Nobody knows all the geologic formations." Landino agreed.

Board President Ken Izant termed it an "unknown fact" on how much water is in the underground. "Until we have more accurate information, though, I think our moratorium is a must."

Kriege agreed in saying that since USGS is standing by its latest report, it is still the "best document" the

district has. "At this particular time, I can't see changing the moratorium," he said.

Landino then centered his attack on county supervisors today considering an expansion of the district's ban on new well drilling to include the entire Purisima Formation, an area about twice the size of the district.

Izant clarified that the district's letter to supervisors did not recommend expansion of the ban, but only asked for support of the district's current ban.

Landino maintained that supervisors are confused on the matter and he saw "no valid reason" to ban new well drilling in areas outside the water district. "It's not fair to penalize those not really connected to the problem," he added.

Kriege pointed out that the board still did not know "where to draw the line."

No action was taken by the water board, other than accepting the reconfirmation of the overdraft by USGS.