

# County Imposes Well Ban, Water Conservation Order

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A limited ban on new well drilling and a modest water conservation order that will go into effect in five weeks were imposed on the Mid-County by county supervisors this morning.

Both actions came in response to a U.S. Geological Survey report that states the Mid-County's underground water basin is being depleted to an extent that sea water is intruding into coastal wells.

Last week, supervisors placed a ban on new lot splits in the Purisima Formation — the aquifer that serves Mid-County — and today the board extended the prohibition on lot splits while allowing about 20 new lots as exemptions. The exemptions are for lots that are undergoing county review and approval.

Supervisor Joe Cucchiara called both actions "prudent and conservative" and noted that the ban on new wells and the water conservation order will mean that new residents and those already here "are being asked to share in the problem."

Supervisors Dan Forbus and Wayne Moore continued to argue that the extent of the problem — if there is one — is unknown and that the board's action these past two weeks is "premature."

They say the county should wait until USGS completes a contour map of the underground basin to determine where the upper water line exists — where it is presumed safe to pump and

no deplete the basin supply — that the map is due to be completed in June.

The conservation order will prohibit the washing of sidewalks, driveways, building exteriors, excessive watering of gardens to where there is excessive runoff and the use of fire hydrant water for new construction.

Soquel Creek County Water District presently has the same conservation order, but has little ability to enforce it and cannot impose a fine.

Supervisors were told that the district could cut off water to violators, however. Under the county's order, persons in the Mid-County (from Branciforte ridge to Valencia ridge and northward to the Zayante Fault line) could be fined up to \$100 for each violation.

Cucchiara wanted new agricultural wells banned and Supervisors' Chairman Gary Patton supported him, but Cucchiara could not win the vote of Supervisor Robley Levy and the motion failed.

Levy also added a provision that the board review the restrictions in one year and when the USGS report is released.

The limited ban on new wells stops all drilling except for those persons with a county building permit. It is estimated that approximately 50 permits a year will be issued in the 25 to 30 square miles involved.

The lot split ban will be a hold on the O'Neil Ranch, proposed for more than 400 units, and the Tan property behind it that is being considered for 300 or so units.

SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL  
April 14, 1981