

County Begins Ban On Wells In Soquel

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County officials this morning began to ban well drilling and new water hookups to existing wells within the Soquel Creek County Water District.

The officials' action followed a 3-2 vote of county supervisors Tuesday that ordered the ban to become effective in 37 days.

However, the Environmental Health Department this morning was refusing to issue permits by invoking a county code which states new wells should be denied "that threaten to jeopardize the health, safety and welfare of the community."

Environmental Health Officer Ray Talley said county supervisors and county counsel agreed he should invoke the code "because that's what the ban is all about."

Persons cannot be denied applying for

well drilling permits, but except for the exemptions of the ban, permits will be denied, Talley said.

The ban was urged by the Water District to support its moratorium on new connections and to protect an underground water supply that the U.S. Geological Survey says is being overdrafted at 1,000 acre feet a year.

Voting for the ban were Supervisors Gary Patton, Joe Cucchiara and Robley Levy. They were prevented from implementing the ban immediately at the board level by the opposition of Supervisors Wayne Moore and Dan Forbus since emergency ordinances require four votes.

Moore and Forbus argued that insufficient evidence was on hand to support the ban and that it threatens to violate the rights of property owners to draw on underground water supplies.

Their arguments were supported by the Associated Drilling Contractors and their

attorney Dennis E. Eubanks of Sacramento who warned the board there were serious legal questions to be answered.

Also opposing the ban was the local Board of Realtors. County officials said 83 permits had been issued in the area in the past two years.

A few citizens urged the board to impose the ban with former San Lorenzo Valley County Water District Director Karen Martin reminding the board, "Water, after all, is the most precious resource."

Robin Brooks of Capitola said, "If (the board) is erring, let the erring be on the side of prudence," and Val Ahlgren of the Summit area said, "Take a conservative view and protect the area."

To protest the proposed ban, well drilling contractor Dick Burns moved his well-drilling rig to the county parking lot and hung a sign on it. "Don't Stop Water

Wells." All he got for his trouble was a \$3 parking ticket.

Forbus said he would support an emergency ordinance if the district was given the right to grant exemptions.

Forbus argued that since the district is the water purveyor for the mid-county area, it had the knowledge to determine which wells would be detrimental to the underground supply.

He didn't convince the board majority and Levy said his system would turn well drilling applicants into "shuttle-cocks."

The county's official ban will come back to the board next Tuesday for final approval and go into effect 30 days thereafter. However, as Talley said, permits will be denied in the interim. The ban area includes all of the Soquel Water District. The ban will not be imposed on persons who were in the 1979 building permit list and are still awaiting permits on the allocation during 1981.

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