

Big water-users must keep track of amounts used

Beginning March 16, all large users on the agricultural, industrial and commercial parcels within the Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency boundaries must begin keeping track of how much water they are pumping out of the basin.

In a unanimous decision, directors Wednesday night approved an ordinance requiring those with well-discharge pipes of three inches or larger to submit extraction reports twice a year. Also, new wells constructed must be designed with a configuration that

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**—Michael Armstrong,
water agency manager**

will accommodate future installation of a flow-measuring device.

A previous provision in the draft ordinance — that all new wells install metering equipment to measure amounts of water use — was scrapped by a three-member committee of the board meeting in the past month.

"We were left purely with an extraction ordinance," said Michael Armstrong, manager of the agency. Directors, nearly half of them new members who joined the board in December, recognized the community is not yet

ready for mandatory water monitoring.

"What we're doing here is taking a half-step forward," Armstrong said.

Armstrong said the board, which last month barely approved mandatory well-registration, at that time was ready to approve the metering-equipment ordinance in full but relegated it to the committee for further study instead.

Introduction of both ordinances was prompted by officials' concern for groundwater in the tri-county district, which is plagued by declining supply levels and saltwater intrusion.

During the ordinance's drafting stages, hundreds of water users packed meeting halls to express their opposition to the proposed policies. In contrast, recent hearings on the subject have been sparsely attended and subdued.

"People understand we as a community need to take action," Armstrong said.

The agency, currently working on its blueprint for managing the water resources of the valley, has been stymied because it doesn't have sufficient data on the 2,000 wells thought to exist within its jurisdiction. While meters would provide researchers with more "accurate" information, officials hope useful knowledge "to help refine our numbers" can be gleaned from the new policies, Armstrong said.

—Laramie Trevino