



COMMUNITY WATER CENTER

EL CENTRO COMUNITARIO POR EL AGUA

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Not-for-profit Organization Focused on Safe Drinking Water Challenges in Low-Income Communities Opens New Office in Watsonville to Serve Central Coast

Watsonville, CA - The Central Coast has a new resource to support environmental justice and ensure that all communities have access to safe, clean, and affordable drinking water. In September, Community Water Center (CWC), a not-for-profit organization opened a new office in Watsonville with a focus on assisting low-income communities on the Central Coast, particularly farmworker communities, address unsafe drinking water problems they are facing.

Each year, more than one million Californians are exposed to unsafe drinking water in their homes and schools. Though drinking water quality problems exist statewide, some of the most significant problems occur in California's agricultural communities, including on the Central Coast. Regionwide, 90 large community water systems rely on a contaminated drinking water source and as many as 250,000 people are impacted by unsafe drinking water that must be treated.

Existing data document that small community water systems and private domestic wells in rural areas are at the highest risk for contaminants such as nitrate, arsenic, and hexavalent chromium. In many areas of the Central Coast, such as the Gilroy-Hollister Valley, Salinas, Valley, and Santa Maria Valley, up to 50% of domestic wells sampled do not meet the safe drinking water standard for nitrate.

“Community Water Center believes that every human being has a right to safe, clean and affordable water,” said CWC Co-Founder and Co-Executive Director Susana De Anda. “No one should have to worry that the water coming out of their tap at home or school is making them or their families sick, and our mission is to work alongside community residents and leaders to advance community-driven solutions for low-income communities struggling with drinking water contamination.”

California was the first state in the nation to pass a law to recognize the [Human Right to Water](#) in 2012. Those most affected by the lack of safe drinking water are also those least able to afford the extra cost of alternative water sources.

Horacio Amezcuita, the General Manager for the San Jerardo Cooperative located near Salinas, recognizes that, "There is still so much work that needs to be done in the Salinas Valley to ensure that all people have clean water in their homes. The community of San Jerardo supports Community Water Center's opening a new Central Coast office to work with local communities to find solutions to our drinking water needs."

Although the government regulates public water systems, drinking water contamination issues are not addressed in many low-income communities due to significant costs to treat contaminated water or find alternative sources for safe drinking water. Communities that get their water from private wells are not regulated by the government.

"It will take a sustained, coordinated effort to address the challenging drinking water issues in the Central Coast and statewide," said CWC's Watsonville-based Director of Community Solutions, Heather Lukacs. "The Community Water Center looks forward to connecting with community members who may have questions about their drinking water and developing new partnerships and strengthening existing ones as we extend our work into this region."

To address the challenges associated with identifying and effectively engaging with communities to help them address drinking water problems, the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board and Bay Foundation of Morro Bay recently awarded a grant to the Community Water Center to expand their services to assist communities on the Central Coast.

"Protecting the public's health is our highest priority. This grant to the Community Water Center aligns with that priority and with the ongoing efforts of our Board and staff to assist low-income communities in addressing unsafe drinking water conditions" said Dr. Monica Hunter, Central Coast Water Board Vice-Chair. Dr. Hunter also serves as the Board's environmental justice liaison.

Since opening their doors in 2006, the Community Water Center has worked with local residents from more than 80 California communities to improve access to safe, clean, and affordable water, focusing on the San Joaquin Valley. They have trained thousands of residents as clean water advocates and provided assistance to community-based organizations struggling with how to manage efficient and accountable water systems in their communities. CWC is a recognized leader in the field of drinking water statewide and nationally, and has been covered by [local, state, nation and international new outlets in English and Spanish](#).

For more information about the Community Water Center, including opportunities for free well testing and safe drinking water programs on the Central Coast, call (831) 288-0450 or go to www.communitywatercenter.org. CWC is also hiring a bilingual

Community Organizer based in the Watsonville office. More information can be found here: https://www.communitywatercenter.org/community_organizer_watsonville

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COMMUNITY WATER CENTER (CWC) is a nonprofit environmental justice organization based in California whose mission is to act as a catalyst for community-driven water solutions through organizing, education, and advocacy. CWC's fundamental goal is to ensure that all communities have access to safe, clean, and affordable water. CWC helps build strategic grassroots capacity to address water challenges in small, rural, low-income communities and communities of color. For more information, visit CWC's website at www.communitywatercenter.org and follow us on Twitter at [@CWaterC](https://twitter.com/CWaterC).