



# Media Release

## **California's groundbreaking water initiative in Tombstone helps residents access safer and cleaner drinking water**

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**SANGER** – Governor Gavin Newsom today announced the groundbreaking of a fully state-funded \$5 million consolidation project in the City of Sanger that will secure safe drinking water for residents who currently rely on private wells. The groundbreaking was attended by the State Water Resources Control Board, the California Environmental Protection Agency, the City of Sanger, drinking water advocates, and residents of the Tombstone Territory.

“All Californians deserve access to clean drinking water – a priority since day one of my administration. Today’s event in Tombstone brings us full circle, because it was in this community where I signed legislation to get safe drinking water into the home of every Californian. Thanks to major state investments, infrastructure projects like this are connecting communities, delivering safe drinking water, and creating a brighter future in rural towns and cities,” said Governor Gavin Newsom.

Tombstone, an unincorporated and severely disadvantaged community about two miles south of Sanger in Fresno County, is where [Gov. Gavin Newsom signed SB 200 in 2019](#), establishing the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund. The fund provides \$130 million annually, through 2030, to address drinking water needs, especially in underserved communities. Since Governor Newsom took office, the number of Californians who don’t have access to clean drinking water has been cut by more than half.

The State Water Board launched the [Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience \(SAFER\)](#) drinking water program in 2019 to advance California’s [Human Right to Water](#). Since 2019, over 250 failing water systems across the state have returned to compliance with drinking water standards, reducing the number of people without access to safe drinking water by nearly half.

“Ninety-eight percent of Californians have reliable access to safe drinking water in their homes, but for too many communities across the state, especially in rural areas, this is not the reality,” said California Secretary for Environmental Protection Yana Garcia. “Helping communities like Tombstone bring about enduring, sustainable drinking water solutions is a top priority for the state. But we can’t do these projects alone or with the



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snap of our fingers. It's a long game that takes collective commitment from every player involved, including water systems, community members, property owners and technical assistance providers."

When the project is completed later this year, Tombstone residents will receive their water through an extension of services from the City of Sanger to their homes.

The project was coordinated through the SAFER program and received \$4 million from [Proposition 68](#) and \$1 million from the state's General Fund.

"Although over 140 consolidations benefiting 300,000 people have been completed since the SAFER program began, we still learn a lot from each one we do. The Tombstone project taught us important lessons about right-of-way and the need to continually adapt to the unique needs of each community," said State Water Board Chair E. Joaquin Esquivel. "Consolidations with domestic well communities are among the most difficult drinking water projects we finance and support, but time and again, what we find is that it is the goodwill of water systems and community members themselves that resolves problems and brings projects over the finish line."

The City of Sanger played a critical role throughout the consolidation planning and design process, embracing the opportunity to extend its services to Tombstone from the beginning. The city applied for and received grant funding, waived surcharges typically levied on customers outside their service area, and helped adapt the project design to avoid right-of-way problems posed by private property lines.

"The Tombstone Project was a collaborative effort of multiple agencies, and I am proud of the work my team contributed," said Sanger City Manager Nathan Olson. "It was easy to recognize the need, so we felt ensuring our neighbors had reliable access to safe drinking water was the only choice. I am so pleased to see all the planning and hard work come to fruition, making the project a success and improving the lives of our communities for generations to come."

"We are thrilled to have reached this tremendous milestone in Tombstone," said Nataly Escobedo Garcia, Ph.D., policy manager for Water and Climate Programs at Leadership Counsel for Justice & Accountability. "Thanks to advocacy from residents, the support of the City of Sanger, and the SAFER program, Tombstone and dozens of other communities are now closer to having access to safe, clean, affordable, and accessible water."

*The State Water Board's mission is to preserve, enhance and restore the quality of California's water resources and drinking water for the protection of the environment, public health, and all beneficial uses, and to ensure proper resource allocation and efficient use for the benefit of present and future generations.*



The SAFER Program includes projects funded by the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund, which is part of California Climate Investments, a statewide initiative that puts billions of Cap-and-Trade dollars to work reducing greenhouse gas emissions, strengthening the economy, and improving public health and the environment - particularly in disadvantaged communities.