

Hillview Water Co.

County: Madera

Population: 4,125

Challenges: Decades of exceeding maximum contaminant levels for uranium and arsenic

California is on a mission when it comes to drinking water. In 2017, the State Water Resources Control Board launched this website, the Human Right to Water Portal, to help the public understand what's at stake and find resources related to a powerful mandate: That every Californian deserves safe and affordable drinking water.



Along the way, the portal will continue provide stories about water systems overcoming obstacles to deliver healthy water to its customers.

The Hillview Water Co. based in Oakhurst is such an example.

Hillview had the perseverance to bring a long-ailing system out of the doldrums and into compliance. It was a 25-year odyssey replete with delays, failed tests and frustration, but also with teamwork, public outreach, transparency and commitment.

For years, the water coming out of the HWC – Oakhurst/Sierra Lakes wells contained excessive amounts of uranium and arsenic. Working with the State Water Board, Hillview used grants and loans via the State Water Board's Division of Financial Assistance and Division of Drinking Water, dealt with a freeze on Proposition 50 funding, and slowly but surely worked to turn things around.

The Hillview success story, says Kassy D. Chauhan, a senior sanitary engineer with the State

Water Board, "highlights some of the challenges you encounter when you can't just go out and pay for a project on your own. When things take that long, the rules change and the players change – and that in itself is a challenge."



Supplying water to Oakhurst and Raymond in Madera County in the central part of the state, Hillview had long been out of compliance for uranium. When the maximum contaminant levels (MCL) changed for arsenic, its water exceeded legal levels for that, too.

“When things go on that long, you get a lot of skepticism from rate payers. But they overcame a lack of trust from the

community,” added Chauhan.

Hillview made a commitment to its customers – if you agree to a rate increase, the water company will make good on its pledge to get into compliance once and for all.

In early March, Hillview finally had a chance to tout an array of good news – 25,000 feet of new water lines; a state-of-the-art treatment plant that removes arsenic, iron and manganese from the water at a 1,200 gallons- per- minute clip; a uranium removal system operating at 1,000 gallons a minute; eight new wells, six new water tanks holding over 1 million gallons of finished water, and much more.

Hillview President Roger Forrester said, “When we began the process of looking for solutions to our water contamination problems and sources of funding, it never entered my mind that it would take twenty-four years before the problems would be 100 percent resolved. We never gave up and continued to pursue every avenue to make sure the problems would be solved.

“I’m overjoyed that our long journey is now at an end with the completed projects better and larger than when we first began. We are proud of our hardworking Hillview staff; thankful for the outstanding contractors we’ve had; and grateful to Waterboards for supporting us through thick and thin, and to our customers for their patience.”

The ambitious project took 12 years and \$19 million, but it now “sends a message of hope,” said Chauhan. “I could give you the names of 10 other water systems where they are wondering are we ever going to get to the end of the road.”

Media Coverage:

Clean water is near for Hillview Water Company customers in Oakhurst

Sierra Star

Hillview Water users in eastern Madera County now have clean water, but it could come at a cost

Sierra Star