

NITRATE MANAGEMENT ZONE OUTREACH

The Management Zones (MZs) have conducted extensive outreach over the past few months to ensure a successful launch of the CV-SALTS Nitrate Control Program in the six Priority 1 Subbasins. This summary is intended to provide a brief overview of the community outreach, early results, lessons learned, and planned future activities.

Key points:

- On March 8th, the MZs met an important milestone by submitting their Preliminary Management Zone Reports, which included their Early Action Plans (EAPs) for delivering safe drinking water.
- MZs successfully met their initial outreach objectives to invite as many people as possible to a series of webinars, gather valuable input on EAPs, lay a foundation for future engagement, and identify effective outreach approaches.
- The next stages will focus on broad community engagement, and direct communication with affected residents to set up water quality testing and deliver clean water solutions.
- MZs are providing bilingual content and access to Spanish-speaking staff every step of the way.
- MZs have been working to overcome several communication challenges. They have been experimenting with direct email, online content, webinars, radio spots, social media, media notices, and community flyers. They have also been leveraging the power of personal networks by asking for help from community leaders.
- There have been some important lessons learned during the initial outreach, and all the MZs are committed to continual improvement, leading to increased community awareness and participation.
- MZs are working closely with local nonprofit organizations, including Self Help Enterprises, Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability, and Community Water Center.

Over 11,000 informational flyers mailed or distributed in communities.

20 virtual community meetings held.

6 online platforms launched (including websites, social media accounts, and story maps)

The attached summary provides additional details.

Early Action Plans

As part of the Nitrate Control Program, the Management Zones (MZ) have completed Part One of their ongoing efforts to provide safe drinking water to residents. The communication work has only begun, but they have made substantial progress and are laying the foundation for effective outreach moving forward. They are focused on involving their communities every step of the way and have experimented with a wide array of outreach activities to enhance their engagement efforts throughout the program.

Part One – Initial Planning and Outreach

The initial step was the successful formation of the Priority 1 MZs: Modesto and Turlock, Chowchilla, Kings, Kaweah, and Tule subbasins.

Then the MZs developed their Preliminary Management Zone Proposals and Early Action Plans (EAPs). They established processes to identify potentially impacted residents and conducted a wide variety of community outreach activities to inform communities about the program and gain input on initial plans.

EAP plan submittal: March 8, 2021. Implementation begins: May 7, 2021.

Part Two – Problem & Solutions Definition

The next phase of the program involves offering testing and safe drinking water solutions to residents impacted by high nitrate levels, working with communities to ensure successful program outcomes, and continuing to expand outreach programs.

Water fill stations have already been constructed and are in use in some MZs. They are very popular and also serve as information hubs where residents can pick up flyers to learn more about the Nitrate Control Program.

Part Three – Implementation

The EAPs focus on three possible water delivery solutions: Bottled water delivery, adding more water fill stations, and potentially installing residential filters (point-of-use). It is too early to tell which solutions will be needed where, and the MZs are developing processes to determine individual preferences.

MZs will utilize all the outreach tools and lessons learned in the prior phases to reach each of the residents who may be affected by high nitrate levels. These residents can have their water tested and if necessary, be provided the water delivery solution that works for their needs.

Communications Objectives and Challenges

Early MZ outreach objectives were to contact as many groups and individuals as possible, lay a foundation for future engagement, and identify approaches that work. The MZs held meetings to educate people about the details of the EAP process, and to obtain input on how it could best serve people affected by unsafe nitrate levels.

There are a variety of communication challenges to overcome when reaching out to residents, including limitations on personal interactions and social gatherings due to COVID, the lack of computers and internet access in some areas, a lack of awareness about water quality problems, language and cultural barriers, and the fact that people have busy lives and limited time to focus on something new.

Early Efforts

MZs have used direct email, webinars, surveys, radio advertising, social media (Facebook, Nextdoor), website content, mailers, newspaper notices, community flyers and postcards, and the assistance of local organizations to reach out to their communities. To reach as many people as possible, they are leveraging the power of personal connection and asking for help from local activists, officials, educators, influencers, and reporters. They are

providing bilingual content and access to Spanish-speaking staff every step of the way. They have provided numerous opportunities for public input on the EAP process and are available to answer questions through multiple online formats and over the phone.

They are also working closely with local nonprofit organizations, including *Self Help Enterprises*, *Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability*, and *Community Water Center*.

Lessons Learned

COVID has limited personal contact, and the MZs and their partner NGOs have been working on new approaches, with a focus on online activities. When it becomes safer to resume door-to-door canvassing and group event networking, they will do so.

The MZs recognize that successfully engaging entire communities in this new program will take time and energy. They are focused on establishing a communications foundation and believe that if they continue to be innovative and leverage as many personal networks as possible, community awareness and participation will grow. They all expressed interest in sharing best practices to ensure the long-term success of the entire program.

EAP outreach is constantly evolving and there have been some interesting early results:

- A Facebook Live presentation, aimed at Spanish-speakers, was hosted by one of the program’s translators and shared through her social media network. This online meeting was organized at the last minute as a replacement for the Spanish portion of an MZ Zoom webinar which had to be cancelled due to technical difficulties. With over 175 participants and 250+ views to date, it has more views than any other MZ meeting. This event highlights not only the success of experimenting with different platforms (Facebook Live might be more accessible and popular than Zoom in some communities), but also the power of finding the right ambassadors and tapping into their existing networks. Building relationships with people with the right connections can take time, but the results speak for themselves.



- Postcards describing the EAP program were left at several popular water refill stations. Rather than asking residents to participate in the program’s development, which might have discouraged people who already feel overwhelmed, the flyers emphasized that the program could provide clean, healthy, free water, with delivery tailored to the user. The result was an increase in phone calls from community members interested in taking advantage of the offer. This highlights that for a certain segment of the community, simply stating what the program has to offer for them will be more appealing than asking for greater involvement or feedback.

- Using Zoom instead of holding in-person meetings has been a new experience for all the MZs, and they have had to learn lessons quickly and adapt on the fly. Some of the best practices they have adapted are:
 1. Holding all questions and comments until the formal presentation is concluded. This prevents the conversation from getting off track.
 2. One MZ received comments that indicated requiring attendees to register for meetings was a disincentive, so they began using open public links instead.
 3. The MZs have learned that they must invite residents to online events through multiple channels (email, mail, websites, flyers, social media, texts, radio & TV, personal connections, etc.), and continue to experiment with new ones, rather than relying on a single outreach method.

Next Steps

The next stage will focus on broad community engagement and direct communication with the residents most likely to have unsafe nitrate levels. Outreach will include information sharing through the mail and online, public meetings (online, and in-person when safe), flyers and posters, and the use community networks. The MZs will continue to work with the NGO partners, local officials, leaders, and activists throughout the entire program to ensure that safe drinking water is provided to every community member in need.

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