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## Nipomo's bad water rating could be

The county Board of Supervisors will reevaluate Nipomo's water situation today — and unfortunately the outlook remains murky. At today's meeting, the board will be asked to certify a Severity Level 3 water supply — the worst possible "grade" a community resource can receive. This isn't a big show. More than a year ago, the board recommended a Severity Level 3 rating for Nipomo's water supply, which required additional conservation measures.

Making a distinction between "certifying" and "recommending" may sound like bureaucratic hairsplitting. It turns out, though, that Nipomo Community Services District officials think they may have a strong chance of qualifying for state and federal funding for a water project if it has the "certified" designation.

That, alone, is reason enough for the board to approve the designation, and we urge the supervisors to do so. But that isn't enough.

Such a dismal ranking as a Severity Level 3 should be more than a cause for concern — it should be a call to action. We urge the Nipomo Community Services District to continue to press forward to find an alternative source of water, to take pressure off the underground water basin now supplying 100 percent of the district's water. Last year, it appeared the district was moving ahead to construct a pipeline that would import water from the Santa Maria River. But the project derailed when it turned out the pipeline would be much costlier than originally estimated — \$24 million, rather than the \$7.5 million to \$9 million that had been estimated.

The Nipomo district is still looking at the pipeline, but it is also considering other options, including a desalination plant. District officials expect to know what direction to take in October, when they have the results of a study that will weigh the pros, cons and costs of the alternatives.

We urge the district not to delay. As we've said before, putting off a public works project — whether it's a bridge or a freeway interchange — will only make it more expensive later.

While there is no immediate water emergency in Nipomo — indeed, some contend the community has a surplus of water — given the amount of growth occurring in the area, there may not be enough water five, 10 or 20 years from now.

Community leaders need to act now, to avoid a crisis down the road.

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