

# Explosion, fire destroy NCSD well

By Mike Hodgson/Associate Editor/mhodgson@theadobepress.com

Nipomo residents are being asked to conserve water in the mornings and evenings after an explosion and fire last week put one of Nipomo Community Services District's main wells out of service.

The fire destroyed much of the equipment at the automated Sundale Well, which produces 30 percent of NCSD's average annual production.

Bruce Buel, NCSD general manager, said reports began coming in around 7:45 p.m. Friday, Aug. 28, about an explosion and fire at the well located in a building at the northeast corner of Dawn and Via Concha roads.

"The initial explosion blew a hole through the roof," Buel said. "Then the fire was pretty hot. It melted the pump and gearbox, all the tubing and the control panel. It's pretty much a total rebuild."

Cal Fire/County Fire Department crews were able to extinguish the fire within half an hour of their arrival, Buel said.

Cal Fire/County Fire Battalion Chief Andy Andersen, who investigated the fire, said the cause was "a mechanical failure in the power source," a diesel engine converted to run on natural gas.

Buel said a contractor was in the process of converting the well from the natural-gas-fired engine to an electric motor.

"We don't know if that work had anything to do with it or not," he said. "We hadn't expected to replace the gearbox and control panel, and now we'll even have to inspect the concrete pad to be sure it's structurally solid." ||

Buel said the district hasn't placed an exact dollar figure on the damage, but he said it was more than \$100,000. Andersen placed the damage estimate at \$250,000.

NCSD has an insurance rider that covers boiler and mechanical issues, and the district is working with its insurance carrier on covering the damage, Buel said.

The Sundale Well is one of the district's two highest-producing wells, capable of pumping 1,000 gallons per minute.

Although the district's other seven wells are now operating at capacity, they can't keep up with peak demands, resulting in some customers experiencing low water flow and low pressure during peak periods, Buel said.

"On Saturday, water levels plummeted," Buel said. "Now that it's cooler, the demand is lower, but we're still having trouble keeping up."

So the district is asking customers to minimize their water use especially from 6 to 9 a.m. and 5 to 8 p.m. until the well is back in service, which is expected to take a month.

"We'd love people to use less water anyway, but especially now during peak periods," Buel said.

Ironically, the NCSD board of directors last week agreed to a set of emergency water shortage

regulations that will be introduced in a public hearing at the meeting set for 9 a.m. Wednesday in the district office, 148 S. Wilson St.

"We were thinking about the resource, not the fire," Buel said of the eight voluntary restrictions the district has been working on for several months.