

Water shortage worsens in Miles

**By Matt Phinney / San Angelo Standard-Times**

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MILES — Students in Miles ate lunch from plastic foam plates with plastic knives and forks Tuesday.

They can no longer shower after gym class and must take their uniforms home to be washed. And administrators soon may turn off the water to some of the school's restrooms.

The steps were taken to conserve water in the small town, which could be on the verge of losing all its supply.

Superintendent Robert Gibson said students are taking the changes in stride.

"I have not heard one person complain," he said. "They realize when the water is gone, it's gone."

Administrators also eliminated all outside watering, including washing school buses and watering the athletic fields and lawns.

The school district is not alone. All of Miles' 895 residents have been asked to do whatever they can to save water.

Miles, located halfway between Ballinger and San Angelo, has banned all outside watering and car washes. Mayor Everett Dodson said residents basically can use water only for drinking, bathing and washing clothes.

By a unanimous vote, city officials Tuesday night moved from Stage 2 to Stage 3 of their drought contingency plan and also increased the charge for excessive water use. Water had been \$30 for the first 2,000 gallons used at each household and an additional \$1.50 for every 1,000 gallons thereafter. Under the price increase, the base rate will stay at \$30 but the excessive users will be charged \$2.50 per 1,000 gallons over 2,000 and \$3.50 per 1,000 gallons over 30,000.

"We're holding our own and cutting back as best we can," Dodson said. "Everyone is concerned about it and most citizens are complying with the regulations."

Conservation methods escalated this week when output from the Coleman Well — the largest source of water in Miles — diminished. The well is pumping 8,000 gallons of water every three hours, said water superintendent Stanley Cole Sr. The well runs for an hour to pump the water and then is turned off for two hours while the well slowly recovers.

Cole said that does not keep up with demand. The pump produced more than 100,000 gallons a day last year, Cole said.

A second source, the Cauley Lane Field in San Angelo, went dry Monday and will take a few days to recover enough to draw any water. But whatever comes from the field won't be much. The city will not use its other option, the Fourth Street Well in Miles, until it is forced to, but even that well likely will last only a few days, Cole said.

Cole said he wants to wait to use Fourth Street water because water from that well is pumped directly into the city's elevated tank. That would free up the new ground tank in Miles to store any water hauled from other areas.

Cole said the city is in negotiations with Winters to buy water for \$3.29 per 1,000 gallons. That does not include the cost of hauling the water, Cole said.

"Once the wells are dry, there is no water in the system," Cole said. "You can't see underground. That's the problem of depending on ground water."

Sklenarik's Smoked Meats in Miles now slaughters animals once every two weeks instead of once a week as it did before the water shortage. However, operators must still clean segments of the facility every day. Owner Paul Sklenarik said he is trying to clean the plant faster and do a better job each day to save water.

"We talked about doing this last week, and when we heard how bad the situation was we decided we had to," Sklenarick said. "If we would have known sooner, we would have made the change. We had no clue it was this bad, but this is a wake-up call."

Sklenarick said his meat plant would have to look for an outside source of water if the city runs out of water or if more restrictions are imposed.

The city of Miles normally uses between 125,000 and 135,000 gallons of water per day during the summer, Cole said. Water usage has dropped to about 67,000-68,000 gallons per day since this weekend, Cole said.

"We are real concerned because the water could go out any day," Cole said. "But the mood has been good here. ... A lot of people have come in and asked how they can help save water."

But probably the best medicine for Miles' troubles is a hard rain, Cole said.

"I'll tell you, the more the merrier," Cole said. "Five or six inches would probably get (Miles) through the summer. But if Ivie (Reservoir) goes down, there will be some others (towns) that are in trouble."