

‘Everything is destroyed.’

Planada residents return to waterlogged homes after massive flood

*By Andrew Kuhn and Victor Patton
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Residents return home after being evacuated due to flooding in Planada, Calif., on Thursday, Jan. 12, 2023.
BY ANDREW KUHN

Planada residents returned to their homes Thursday morning, two days after being evacuated following a relentless rainstorm that flooded their community.

Residents like Maria Zaragoza, 53, came home to carpets completely soaked with floodwater. Zaragoza has flood insurance, but she’s worried it’s going to be difficult to cover all of the costs. “The garage, everything is destroyed,” Zaragoza said. “It’s going to cost a lot.”

Zaragoza was among many residents getting information and resources from longtime Planada activist Alicia Rodriguez, president of St. Vincent De Paul Planada Sacred Heart Conference.

Rodriguez was busy Thursday morning, fielding calls from residents in need of help and making house visits. “All of this was underwater,” Rodriguez said, standing in the middle of a residential Planada neighborhood near Vallejo Avenue and Latham Drive. “A resident was telling me it was 4 feet (deep) in some places.”

This week’s rainstorm flooded Miles Creek in Planada and Bear Creek in Merced. The heavy rains resulted in mandatory evacuations in both areas, causing thousands of affected residents to seek shelter at the Merced County Fairgrounds or elsewhere.

Around 1 a.m. Thursday, Merced County Sheriff Vern Warnke [downgraded Planada’s mandatory evacuation status](#) to an evacuation warning. That means residents who were under mandatory orders to leave earlier this week, like Zaragoza, could now return to their homes.

Many challenges are ahead for Planada residents. Sheriff officials advise Planada residents who return home to not drink the tap water, as it may be contaminated.

“A boil notice is in effect. Drink bottled water only until further notice. If you live on a property with a residential well, boiling water will not completely disinfect the water to safe drinking levels,” the Sheriff’s Office post on Facebook says.

With more rain on the way, city workers, volunteers and residents alike are working rapidly to prepare for more potential flooding, Case in point, City of Merced workers were seen at Bear Creek on Wednesday, stacking sand bags along its banks.

Carlos Molina, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Hanford, said light rain is expected in Merced County by Friday morning. The intensity of the rain will increase throughout the day Friday, and a stronger storm is expected to hit Merced County on Saturday.

Merced County could see up to a half-inch of rain through Saturday, with lingering showers into Sunday. Light rain is expected next week.

Merced has reported 4.60 inches of rain for January, well over the average of 3.75 inches. Merced County has seen 2.95 inches of rain in the past week.

Bear Creek had receded to a depth of 19 feet as of Thursday morning, which is still considered critical by the weather service, but far below the 26 feet it had risen to earlier this week.

Twenty-three feet is considered flood stage for the creek.

How to help

There are many ways to help those most impacted by the floods.

Le Grand Union High School is accepting donations of supplies to help support Planada families and others, according to a news release from the Merced County Office of Education.

Supplies can include: toiletries and personal necessities, blankets and bedding, portable chargers and heaters, clothing, shoes and socks, diapers and baby wipes, bottled water and food (non-perishables), and gift cards for gas.

Donations can be dropped off Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Le Grand Agriculture Department.

Those in need can pick up items at the Le Grand High School Gymnasium, 12961 E Le Grand Road, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday through Friday, starting Friday, Jan. 13.

The City of Merced is collecting donations to help those in need. For information for how to donate items or volunteer, visit cityofmerced.org. Merced County has a flood information hotline: (209) 385-7563.

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<https://www.mercedsunstar.com/news/weather-news/article271086162.html>