

Indian River County replaces septic tanks for 10 families in west Wabasso

The \$40,000 grant will replace wells in west Wabasso, some of which produce brown water, forcing residents there to buy bottled water.

By Henry A. Stephens
staff writer

INDIAN RIVER COUNTY — Ten families in west Wabasso, including three living in federal emergency trailers, will be getting new septic tanks to replace the old ones crumbling under them, officials said Monday.

"These are the folks who live in shacks and have brown water and homemade septic tanks that are 50 years old and literally crumbling," county Environmental Health Specialist Julianne Renk said.

West Wabasso, north of County Road 510 and between 58th and 66th avenues, surprises many visitors with its stark contrast from the rest of the county's residential neighborhoods.

Some of the roads are little more than paths meandering among the houses. There are no sidewalks or county utilities. Wells yield brown water, forcing residents to buy bottled water.

Louise Hubbard, executive director of the Treasure Coast Homeless Services Council, said the county Environmental Health Division would be getting \$40,000 toward septic tanks from a \$150,000 state grant to the homeless-aid council.

Lucy Hadi, secretary of the state Department of Children and Families, announced the \$150,000 grant Monday as part of a \$2.1 million aid package to combat homelessness statewide.

Of the rest of her grant, Hubbard said:

- \$60,000 is going to help 70 people pay rent and utilities to avoid eviction and cutoff.
- \$50,000 will help expand the agency's 47-member provider database, connecting 10 more agencies, so aid can be tracked better and not duplicated.

The new grant follows a separate DCF grant of \$100,000 to the county's Homeless Family Center to continue operating the combination individual/family shelter on Fourth Street.

Renk, meanwhile, said she was relieved to get the \$40,000 share to cover at least 10 new septic tanks at \$4,000 each.

"This was one issue we just couldn't make any progress on," she said.

The state Department of Community Affairs is expected to provide \$702,000 in a Community Development Block Grant for an unrelated project extending county waterlines into west Wabasso.

But that project won't include sewer connections, Renk said.

"And the major reason for that is the monthly bill of \$40 or \$50," which would be a challenge for residents there to pay, she said.

So county officials decided to replace old septic tanks instead of hooking the residents to a new sewer system, she said.