

Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment



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Cal/EPA releases nation's first comprehensive statewide screening tool

CalEnviroScreen 1.0 identifies California communities most burdened by multiple pollutants

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SACRAMENTO – The California Environmental Protection Agency today released the nation's first comprehensive statewide environmental health screening tool. CalEnviroScreen 1.0 is a science-based tool that identifies the California communities most burdened by pollution from multiple sources and most vulnerable to its effects.

“By identifying communities across the state that are burdened by environmental and health issues, we have a better understanding of where to prioritize our limited resources,” said Cal/EPA Secretary Matt Rodriguez. “Promoting their environmental health also is an important step in restoring their economic vitality.”

Developed jointly by the Agency and the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA), the tool uses data about 11 types of pollution and environmental factors and seven population characteristics and socioeconomic factors to create scores for each ZIP code in the state. It will help state decision-makers prioritize resources to target grants, investments, cleanup efforts, and enforcement actions to the state's most disadvantaged communities.

“Rather than addressing each pollutant separately, CalEnviroScreen helps scientists and regulators look at multiple pollutants and factors at once,” said OEHHA Director George Alexeeff, Ph.D.

Every major region of the state except the rural North has some communities that ranked among the highest 10 percent for combined burdens and vulnerabilities from pollution, other environmental factors and population characteristics. Approximately half of the ZIP codes that ranked in the top 10 percent are in the greater Los Angeles area, including the Inland Empire. The San Joaquin Valley contains another 29 percent of the most vulnerable communities.

“This is a crucial first step toward bringing desperately needed investment to some of California's most polluted and economically struggling neighborhoods,” said Ryan Young of The Greenlining Institute. “In the long run, you can't have a healthy economy without a healthy environment.”

The tool will first be used to identify disadvantaged communities for a state law that requires 25 percent of the proceeds from cap-and-trade auctions must be invested in projects that benefit these communities, including 10 percent for projects located in those areas. The Agency plans to use it to administer its Environmental Justice Small Grant Program. The tool will also help to prioritize resources for cleanup and abatement projects and outreach efforts by the Agency's boards and departments.

"CalEnviroScreen is an opportunity for cities to identify concerns and provide investments in our community that will promote its economic growth," said Culver City Councilmember Meghan Sahli-Wells.

The tool has some limitations. Its scoring results are not directly applicable to the cumulative impacts analysis required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). It compares the relative burdens on each community but is not an absolute measure of those burdens. The tool is not a substitute for formal risk assessment and cannot predict whether burdens on a community are high enough to cause health concerns.

CalEnviroScreen was developed through an extensive public review process. The process included two public review drafts and 12 public workshops in seven regions of the state that yielded more than 1,000 comments and questions.

"Cal/EPA went the extra mile to conduct workshops in our region and seek our input on ways to improve the tool," said Hasan Ikhata, executive director of the Southern California Association of Governments. "We appreciate the revisions that were made and we look forward to continued collaboration with Cal/EPA on using this tool to support environmental compliance and at the same time stimulate economic growth throughout California."

The Agency and OEHHA are committed to continuing to revise and improve the tool through an open and public process. Future versions will add drinking water quality information, details for census tracts, and other revisions to keep the facts, format, and method as current as possible.

"In the months and years ahead, we will explore new uses for the tool," said Arsenio Mataka, the Agency's Assistant Secretary for Environmental Justice. "CalEnviroScreen represents an important step in honoring our commitment to address environmental justice issues for the benefit of all of California's communities and residents."

The CalEnviroScreen report and maps are available at <http://www.oehha.ca.gov/ej/>.