

# CALIFORNIA COMMUNITIES ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SCREENING TOOL, VERSION 1 (CALENVIROSCREEN 1.0)

## GUIDANCE AND SCREENING TOOL



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# GUIDANCE FROM THE SECRETARY

During the past three years, one of our top priorities has been to integrate environmental justice principles throughout the California Environmental Protection Agency's (Cal/EPA's or Agency's) boards, departments and office. State law defines environmental justice to mean "the fair treatment of people of all races, cultures, and incomes with respect to the development, adoption, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies." This definition should not just be words or an illusory concept; rather, it must be a goal to strive for and achieve. Cal/EPA's mission is to restore, protect and enhance the environment, and to ensure public health, environmental quality and economic vitality. Environmental justice and investment in communities burdened by pollution are critical to accomplishing this mission.

Despite the best efforts of many segments of society, a large number of Californians live in the midst of multiple sources of pollution and some people and communities are more vulnerable to the effects of pollution than others. In order to respond to this situation, it is important to identify the areas of the state that face multiple pollution burdens so programs and funding can be targeted appropriately toward improving the environmental health and economic vitality of the most impacted communities. For this reason, the Agency and the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) have developed a science-based tool for evaluating multiple pollutants and stressors in communities, called the California Communities

Environmental Health Screening Tool (CalEnviroScreen).

To ensure that the first version of this tool, CalEnviroScreen 1.0, is properly understood and utilized, we are providing the following guidance to the Agency, its boards, departments, and office, as well as the public and stakeholders.

CalEnviroScreen should be used primarily to assist the Agency in carrying out its environmental justice mission: to conduct its activities in a manner that ensures the fair treatment of all Californians, including minority and low-income populations. The tool is the next step in the implementation of the Agency's 2004 Environmental Justice Action Plan, which called for the development of guidance to analyze the impacts of multiple pollution sources in California communities.

The tool shows which portions of the state have higher pollution burdens and vulnerabilities than other areas, and therefore are most in need of assistance. In a time of limited resources, it will provide meaningful insight into how decision makers can focus available time, resources, and programs to improve the environmental health of Californians, particularly those most burdened by pollution. The tool uses existing environmental, health, demographic and socioeconomic data to create a screening score for communities across the state. An area with a high score would be expected to experience much higher impacts than areas with low scores.

Cal/EPA and OEHHA are committed to revising the tool in the future, using an open and public process, as new information becomes available in order to make the tool as meaningful and as current as possible. Over the next several years, we plan to refine the tool by considering additional indicators, modifying the geographic scale, enhancing the current indicators, and reassessing the tool's methodology. In addition, we will look for new ways to ensure the tool is accessible and comprehensible to the public.



## Background

Cal/EPA released the first draft of CalEnviroScreen for public review and comment in July 2012. This draft built upon a 2010 report<sup>1</sup> that described the underlying science and a general method for identifying communities that face multiple pollution burdens. It further developed and explained the methodology described in the 2010 report. After releasing the first draft, Cal/EPA and OEHHA conducted 12 public workshops in seven regions throughout the state. At these workshops, the methodology and our conclusions were discussed with the public and a wide range of stakeholders, including community, business, industry, academic and governmental groups. These regional workshops yielded over 1000 oral and written comments and questions. A subsequent draft was released in January 2013. Cal/EPA and OEHHA solicited additional comments and suggestions, and considered them in making additional changes to the tool.

## Potential Uses

Potential uses of the tool by Cal/EPA and its boards, departments, and office include administering environmental justice grants, promoting greater compliance with environmental laws, prioritizing site-cleanup activities, and identifying opportunities for sustainable economic development in heavily impacted neighborhoods. Other entities and interested parties may identify additional uses for this tool and the information it provides.

### *Implementation of SB 535*

CalEnviroScreen will inform Cal/EPA's identification of disadvantaged communities pursuant to Senate Bill 535 (De León, Chapter 830, Statutes of 2012). SB 535 requires Cal/EPA to identify

disadvantaged communities based on geographic, socioeconomic, public health, and environmental hazard criteria. It also requires that the investment plan developed and submitted to the Legislature pursuant to Assembly Bill 1532 (John A. Pérez, Chapter 807, Statutes of 2012) allocate no less than 25 percent of available proceeds from the carbon auctions held under California's Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 to projects that will benefit these disadvantaged communities. At least 10 percent of the available moneys from these auctions must be directly allocated in such communities. Since CalEnviroScreen has been developed to identify areas that are disproportionately affected by pollution and those areas whose populations are socioeconomically disadvantaged, it is well suited for the purposes described by SB 535.

### *Environmental Justice Activities*

CalEnviroScreen will be useful in administering the Agency's Environmental Justice Small Grant Program, and may guide other grant programs as well as environmental education and community programs throughout the state. It will also help to inform Agency boards and departments when they are budgeting scarce resources for cleanup and abatement projects. Additionally, CalEnviroScreen will help to guide boards and departments when planning their community engagement and outreach efforts. Knowing which areas of the state have higher relative environmental burdens will not only help with efforts to increase compliance with environmental laws in disproportionately impacted areas, but also will provide Cal/EPA and its boards, departments, and office with additional insights on the potential implications of their activities and decisions.

### *Local and Regional Governments*

Local and regional governments, including regional air districts, water districts, and planning and transit agencies, may also find uses for this tool. Cal/EPA will continue to work with local and regional

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<sup>1</sup> OEHHA and Cal/EPA (2012) *Cumulative Impacts: Building a Scientific Foundation*, Sacramento, CA. Available online at: <http://www.oehha.ca.gov/ej/cipa123110.html>

governments to further explore the applicability of CalEnviroScreen for other uses. This includes the possibility of helping to identify and plan for opportunities for sustainable development in heavily impacted neighborhoods. These areas could also be targeted for cleaning up blight and promoting development in order to bring in jobs and increase economic stability. As an example, the tool could assist efforts to develop planning and financial incentives to retain jobs and create new, sustainable business enterprises in disproportionately impacted communities.

Of course, it will be important to work with organizations such as economic development corporations, workforce investment boards, local chambers of commerce, and others to develop strategies to help businesses thrive in the identified areas and to attract new businesses and services to those areas. CalEnviroScreen may also assist local districts and governments with meeting their obligations under certain state funding programs. Finally, it is important to remember that CalEnviroScreen provides a broad environmental snapshot of a given region. While the data gathered in developing the tool could be useful for decision makers when assessing existing pollution sources in an area, more precise data are often available to local governments and would be more relevant in conducting such an examination.

### General Notes and Limitations

CalEnviroScreen was developed for Cal/EPA and its boards, departments, and office. Its publication does not create any new programs, regulatory requirements or legal obligations. There is no mandate express or implied that local governments or other entities must use the tool or its underlying data. Planning, zoning and development permits are matters of local control and local governments are free to decide whether the tool's output or the information contained in the tool provide an understanding of the environmental burdens and vulnerabilities in their localities.

While CalEnviroScreen will assist Cal/EPA and its boards, departments, and office in prioritizing resources and help promote greater compliance with environmental laws, it is important to note some of its limitations. The tool's output provides a relative ranking of communities based on a selected group of available datasets, through the use of a summary score. The CalEnviroScreen score is not an expression of health risk, and does not provide quantitative information on increases in cumulative impacts for specific sites or projects. Further, as a comparative screening tool, the results do not provide a basis for determining when differences between scores are significant in relation to public health or the environment. Accordingly, the tool is not intended to be used as a health or ecological risk assessment for a specific area or site.

Additionally, the CalEnviroScreen scoring results are not directly applicable to the cumulative impacts analysis required under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The statutory definition of "cumulative impacts" contained in CEQA is substantially different than the working definition of "cumulative impacts" used to guide the development of this tool. Therefore, the information provided by this tool cannot be used as a substitute for an analysis of the cumulative impacts of any specific project for which an environmental review is required by CEQA.

Moreover, CalEnviroScreen assesses environmental factors and effects on a regional or community-wide basis and cannot be used in lieu of performing an analysis of the potentially significant impacts of any specific project. Accordingly, a lead agency must determine independently whether a proposed project's impacts may be significant under CEQA based on the evidence before it, using its own discretion and judgment. The tool's results are not a substitute for this required analysis. Also, this tool considers some social, health, and economic factors that may not be relevant when doing an analysis under CEQA. Finally, as mentioned above,

the tool's output should not be used as a focused risk assessment of a given community or site. It cannot predict or quantify specific health risks or effects associated with cumulative exposures identified for a given community or individual.

### Conclusion

We are proud of the collaborative work of OEHHA and the input of the departments and boards in Cal/EPA as well as the level of public participation and level of input we received in the development of CalEnviroScreen. This project represents the largest public screening tool effort in the nation -- both in geographic scope and level of detail. It is an achievement that could not have been realized had it not been for the tireless efforts of OEHHA and the invaluable input of all of our stakeholders.

The development of CalEnviroScreen involved many residents, community-based organizations, nongovernmental organizations, local officials, state agencies and representatives from business, industry and academia. The release of the CalEnviroScreen 1.0 is just the first step. If CalEnviroScreen is to succeed, that cooperative effort must continue. I welcome your active participation as we move forward with future versions of CalEnviroScreen and work to advance environmental justice and economic vitality.



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