



Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA)  
Attn: Carolyn Flowers  
P.O. Box 4010  
Sacramento, CA 95812-4010

October 19, 2016

RE: Comments on the Draft CalEnviroScreen 3.0

Dear Ms. Flowers,

On the behalf of the California Environmental Justice Alliance (CEJA), we are respectfully submitting comments and recommendations for the draft CalEnviroScreen 3.0. As a statewide alliance that unites eleven grassroots organizations and over 20,000 residents from frontline environmental justice (EJ) communities across the state, we commend the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment and CalEPA for continuing to maintain a comprehensive cumulative impacts tool that can identify some of the most overburdened EJ communities in California. As groups that have advocated for a method to assess multiple EJ burdens for over a decade, we strongly support the continued use of CalEnviroScreen in both state and local policy so that it may be appropriately used to prioritize important investments, improvements and protections for our state's most vulnerable communities.

In order to ensure that CalEnviroScreen can identify the state's most disadvantaged communities as accurately as possible, CEJA is proposing the following additions and modifications to the tool. These recommendations reflect the concerns and real life experiences of the local communities that CEJA partners with and is substantiated through our research on appropriate indicators for identifying EJ communities. We would also like to thank Dr. Rachel Morello-Frosch, co-creator of the Environmental Justice Screening Methodology (EJSM), and OEHHA researchers Dr. John Faust and Laura August for providing their invaluable insight and feedback to our recommendations.

### **CEJA's Recommendations for Additions and Changes to CalEnviroScreen 3.0**

#### **1. Publish regional rankings on the OEHHA CalEnviroScreen website to analyze and produce data on the top EJ communities from a regional perspective**

CEJA recommends that OEHHA develop a methodology for regional rankings and publish the dataset on its website. This would allow a larger range of stakeholders, including community based groups and local agencies, more flexibility to use CalEnviroScreen in a wider range of applications to address environmental justice issues.



Our recommendation does not include any suggested uses of the statewide rankings at this time. OEHHA's development and publication of a regional ranking system and providing that data publicly is a critical path to opening more uses of the tool and addressing the cumulative burden in EJ communities.

Increasingly, local and regional agencies are looking at ways to use CalEnviroScreen, but based on regional rankings. For example, the City of San Diego Climate Action Plan is exploring this option. It is important for OEHHA to publish a recommended system for doing such an analysis to ensure that there is an established best practice.

Regional rankings would also be beneficial to areas where there are EJ communities that do not show up in a statewide ranking system, but are certainly disadvantaged regionally. In San Francisco, members of PODER, a grassroots group organizing around the Mission District of San Francisco, have expressed that having regional rankings could help them to gain stronger protections for immigrant and other low-income residents that experience pollution and are being displaced from their longtime homes.

Developing a methodology for regional rankings and publishing that online would be an empowering for local residents that want to (and continue to) use CalEnviroScreen to identify and advocate for their EJ needs, especially at the local and regional levels.

## **2. Provide recommendations for the best uses of CalEnviroScreen at the local and state levels beyond funding allocation**

While CalEnviroScreen is more widely known as a tool that is used to allocate climate investments to disadvantaged communities, we also recognize that it is an incredibly important and versatile tool that could be included in much broader policy applications. In addition to promoting the incorporation of CalEnviroScreen into state policies that impact EJ communities, we highly recommend that OEHHA produce and publish guidelines that provide recommendations on how to implement the tool at the local and regional levels.

In recent years, CEJA organizations have advocated for the use of CalEnviroScreen in local decision-making related to permitting, siting, enforcement, and other planning-related issues. In the Central Valley, Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability has used the tool to protest the siting of a new chemical warehouse in an EJ community in Fresno. Residents used CalEnviroScreen maps to show that the new warehouse would be built in a disadvantaged community that is already overburdened with numerous cumulative impacts. The organization has also used the tool to determine the most appropriate locations for improvements such as affordable housing, and has pushed for its inclusion in General Plan revisions. The Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice (CCA EJ) in the Inland Valley has requested their regional air district to incorporate the tool in their air quality assessments. While some studies



only observe ozone, PM<sub>2.5</sub> and some socioeconomic issues such as poverty, many local groups understand that CalEnviroScreen is a more comprehensive and effective tool to analyze EJ impacts. Similarly, the Environmental Health Coalition (EHC) based in National City has advocated for the inclusion of the tool in regional air district grantmaking decisions. EHC also plans on advocating for the incorporation of CalEnviroScreen into priority enforcement and compliance-related policies, as well as business inspection schedules.

As a scientific tool that provides a comprehensive way to identify EJ communities, it is important to educate policymakers, local government agencies and community groups about the various ways in which CalEnviroScreen can provide greater protections and resources for vulnerable communities across California.

### **3. Give environmental effects indicators a full weight instead of a half weight for calculating overall pollution burden scores in CalEnviroScreen**

From our work with community-based groups around the state, we know that many of the issues included in the environmental effects indicators are directly impacting communities. For example, many communities continue to struggle with the daily health problems that come from living next to toxic cleanup sites and hazardous waste facilities, or severe health risks from engaging in their weekly traditional practice of subsistence fishing.

In addition to fully capturing the impacts of these issues, there is insufficient evidence to justify the half weight for all environmental effects indicators within the CalEnviroScreen tool. Other cumulative impact screening tools, such as the leading Environmental Justice Screening Methodology (EJSM), does not differentially weight any of its metrics because current academic literature provides insufficient or absent guidance for giving any single indicator or group of indicators additional or fewer weighting.

Giving all environmental effects indicators a full weight within CalEnviroScreen may also capture some of the communities that are disproportionately burdened but currently not identified in the top 25th percentile of CalEnviroScreen results. CEJA respectfully requests OEHHA to conduct and publicize a sensitivity analysis that shows the results of weighting environmental effects at a full weight (1.0) instead of a half (0.5) for all census tracts. If there is a significant change based on this analysis, we recommend fully weighting these indicators in the next version.

### **4. As an alternative to omitting the age indicator from CalEnviroScreen, include an indicator that measures the percentage of children within a census tract**

While we understand that it is challenging to include an age indicator in CalEnviroScreen that measures both 'children under 10' as well as 'adults ages 65 and older,' CEJA recommends including an indicator that calculates the population of children within each census tract, with



higher scores given to tracts with higher percentages of children. We also recommend using the same age limit as the 2.0 version: children under 10.

As various studies have documented, children face higher vulnerabilities and experience more severe health problems compared to adults when exposed to pollution. Children on average spend more time outdoors and are therefore more likely to interact with greater quantities of toxins and pollution compared to adults. According to the OEHHA website, children tend to weigh less, have more exposed skin in proportion to their weight, and breathe at a quicker rate compared to adults, all of which can expose them to greater amounts of chemicals and pollutants from their food and the environment.<sup>1</sup>

Calculating the percentage of children within each census tract also allows CalEnviroScreen to register many of California's most vulnerable EJ populations. As Dr. Morello-Frosch and other researchers have shown, tracts that contain higher percentages of children can often be found in predominantly immigrant communities, many low-income communities, and neighborhoods containing higher proportions of residents of color. For instance, on the Central Coast of California, CAUSE (Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy) has found that high pesticide usage, power plants, and oil and gas facilities tend to be concentrated around the mostly immigrant Latino farmworker communities of the region that have high percentages of children.

In addition to including an indicator that measures the population of children, CEJA respectfully requests OEHHA to conduct and publicize a sensitivity analysis that shows the impact of this indicator on CalEnviroScreen results.

#### **5. Incorporate data from the California Air Resources Board's (ARB's) "Facilities of Interest" database to capture important local pollution sources**

ARB's "Facilities of Interest" database analyzes many local sources of pollution that are not currently included under the current CalEnviroScreen. These can include small facilities such as paint and autobody shops which are common health hazards in neighborhoods such as the Mission District of San Francisco, East Oakland, and the Pacoima neighborhood of Los Angeles. The database also includes facilities reporting to the AB 32 Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Mandatory Reporting program that emit over 25,000 metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub>e), facilities that report to the CA Emission Inventory Development and Reporting Systems (CEIDARS) that produce light industrial emissions, and facilities that emitting >10 tons per year for all chemicals.

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<sup>1</sup> Office of Environmental Health and Hazard Assessment (2014). "Age: Children and Elderly." Retrieved from: <http://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen/indicator/age-children-and-elderly>



As we understand that OEHHA is already in the process of looking at the data from the “Facilities of Interest” database, we welcome OEHHA to contact us with any additional questions or to discuss the potential inclusion of this database in CalEnviroScreen.

#### **6. Enhance specific pollution indicators to incorporate measurements that can effectively capture smaller and additional sources of pollution**

While the ‘hazardous waste generators and facilities’ indicator does include data related to large polluting entities, it does not take into account smaller generators and facilities, nor those that are situated over 1,000 meters from populated census tracts. In addition, while the ‘toxic releases from facilities’ indicator measures air contamination, it does not include data on land or water contamination nor data from facilities of smaller sizes. We recommend that OEHHA conduct a sensitivity analysis to explore the impacts of expanding these two indicators so that they are more inclusive of these additional and significant sources of pollution.

#### **7. Incorporate a metric on hazard proximity beyond waste generators and facilities**

The Environmental Justice Screening Methodology has developed an easily replicable metric for hazard proximity that could be included into CalEnviroScreen. There is sufficient literature and local testimony that demonstrate that simply living in close proximity to facilities that are hazardous, such as ports, rail yards, airports and others has a negative impact on health and quality of life.

For instance, one report written by the Center for International Trade and Transportation (2004) shows that, in addition to contributing to severe air pollution, ports can cause substantial traffic congestion on freeways and local streets that can lead to great burdens on local infrastructure and can cause community deterioration.<sup>2</sup> Living near airports, ports and rail yards has also prompted residents to voice concerns over high noise levels at all hours, a lack of progressive and beneficial investments coming into the surrounding neighborhoods, and various public health problems related to incompatible land use and zoning. In East Oakland for example, EJ organizations such as Communities for a Better Environment (CBE) successfully fought against a proposal that would allow trains carrying volatile crude oil to pass through their low-income, predominantly people of color neighborhoods. A report conducted by CBE and ForestEthics

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<sup>2</sup> O'Brien, T. (2004, March). Quality of Life and Port Operations: Challenges, Successes and the Future. In *White Paper prepared for the sixth Annual CITT State of the Trade and Transportation Industry Town Hall Meeting. CITT: Long Beach*. Retrieved at: <http://cites.eerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.410.235&rep=rep1&type=pdf>



also found that “Californians of color are more likely to live in the oil train blast zone, the dangerous one-mile evacuation zone in the case of an oil train derailment and fire.”<sup>3</sup>

Given the dangers and public health issues that are related to such land use hazards, CEJA recommends that OEHHA include the data and methodology to measure proximity to hazards developed through EJSM in CalEnviroScreen.

Thank you for considering CEJA’s comments to the draft CalEnviroScreen 3.0. Please feel free to reach out to us at any time to discuss these recommendations further or in person. We truly appreciate your commitment to strengthening the CalEnviroScreen tool and look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

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<sup>3</sup> Sher, E., Rivera, A., & Soto, A. (2015). “*Crude Injustice on the Rails Report Calls Out Environmental Racism.*” Communities for a Better Environment website, June 30, 2015. Retrieved at: <http://www.cbecal.org/media/cbe-updates/crude-injustice-on-the-rails-report-calls-out-environmental-racism/>