

Background and Purpose

On September 30, 2020, the County of San Diego Air Pollution Control Board directed the Air Pollution Control Officer to assign a Deputy Director and a Public Information Officer to support the development and implementation of a Community Emissions Reduction Plan (CERP) as part of the implementation of the Air Pollution Control District's (APCD) Community Air Protection Program (CAPP). These two positions will develop strategies to engage environmental justice stakeholders and the CAPP community in policy and budget development, and priority setting. Also, these staff will help shape agency programs, including the CERP, permit fee structures, APCD rule development, the CAPP, and facilitate multi-lingual community relations. Subsequently, the Board adopted Phase I of the Portside CERP, which proposed the creation of an Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ) within APCD.

Building on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's definition of Environmental Justice (EJ), APCD refers to it as "the equitable treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, income, gender, or ability, with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies." The OEJ will work to intentionally integrate environmental justice considerations in all agency actions. This will include support for meaningful community engagement and the promotion of environmental justice and equity considerations in decision-making, including rule development, permit review, complaints, and in the development of other documents and actions.

Scope and Responsibilities

The OEJ will work internally within and across APCD Programs to:

- Inform Board members and staff on matters of environmental justice and equity
- Collaborate with staff to foster and uphold an internal culture of equity, diversity, and inclusion
- Work with staff to ensure that an equity and environmental justice lens is used to analyze situations and devise solutions to environmental and air quality challenges

The OEJ will work externally with all stakeholders to:

- Identify opportunity areas to better serve communities on air quality matters
- Expand opportunities for public engagement that result in meaningful participation in decision-making
- Work collaboratively with communities, other agencies, and organizations to address air quality challenges in the most impacted communities

Goals and Strategies

Goal 1: Design an educational plan for APCD Board members with a focus on areas of the region that are disproportionately impacted by air pollution.

Goal 2: Foster and uphold an internal culture at APCD that supports Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

Goal 3: Integrate environmental justice and equity in APCD's operations, policies, and regulations.

Goal 4: Improve APCD's outreach and education efforts in communities, with a special focus on disadvantaged communities most affected by pollution.

Goal 5: Collaborate with other organizations and government agencies to address air quality challenges more comprehensively.

GOAL 1: Design an educational plan for APCD Board members with a focus on areas of the region that are disproportionately impacted by air pollution.

Background: From 1955 to February 2021, the 5-member County of San Diego Board of Supervisors served as the APCD's governing board, known as the Air Pollution Control Board. As of March 1, 2021, Assembly Bill 423 (Gloria, 2019) required the appointment of a new 11-member governing board consisting of: two County supervisors, the mayor or a city council member at large from the City of San Diego, one city council member from each supervisorial district, and three public members appointed by the governing board.

The APCD Hearing Board consists of five members appointed by the Air Pollution Control District Governing Board. The members of the Hearing Board have professional experience in the fields of medicine, engineering, law, and include two members of the public. The Hearing Board is an impartial entity established to hear and decide appeals from permit denials, application for variances from Air Pollution Control District Rules and Regulations and hear abatement order requests.

Strategies:

1. Develop materials that will inform Governing Board and Hearing Board members of the health effects of air pollution, including a map of the region with a focus on the highest risk communities and how they compare to the rest of the county
2. Provide information and updates on the Air Toxics Hot Spot Program and air monitoring locations highlighting air pollution trends among the disadvantaged communities
3. Engage individual Board members on Environmental Justice communities in the districts they represent to build upon the data/information APCD has on those communities, especially those communities APCD has not engaged with yet

GOAL 2: Foster and uphold an internal culture at APCD that supports Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

Background: To accomplish APCD's vision of 'Clean Air for All', the first step is to look within and ensure that the values of equity, diversity, and inclusion are upheld throughout the agency. The internal culture in an organization inevitably reflects on the services it provides and the impact it has on society. APCD will work continuously to ensure its team members understand the importance of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, and uphold those values in their daily interactions with their colleagues and with the communities APCD serves.

Strategies:

1. Provide training opportunities to APCD staff on equity, diversity, and inclusion
2. Support activities that are inclusive and that celebrate and embrace the diversity of the APCD team
3. Share information among APCD staff on how each division contributes to environmental equity
4. Create internal and external outreach pieces highlighting staff from all APCD divisions to highlight the diversity of APCD staff, the work they do, and how that person's specific work contributes to environmental equity in the region
5. Promote staff participation in Employee Resource Groups

GOAL 3: Integrate environmental justice and equity in APCD's operations, policies, and regulations.

Background: To meaningfully address environmental justice and communities most impacted by both COVID-19 pandemic and poor air quality, on September 30, 2020, the County Board of Supervisors, acting as the Air Pollution Control Board, approved the recommendations to implement two staffing assignments to focus on the development of an OEJ within the District. OEJ staff would assist in shaping the agency programs, including the CAPP, permit fee structures, APCD rule development, and facilitate multi-lingual community relations.

In addition, as part of APCD's CAPP, the Portside Community Steering Committee included a request for an Office of Environmental Justice under the CERP list of actions. The new OEJ will help provide underserved communities with additional opportunities to fully participate in the decision-making process and will provide institutional support to the CAPP.

Strategies:

1. Provide a framework for leadership and staff with direction and guidance to integrate environmental justice into APCD's work
2. Identify commitments from each division/program within APCD to support environmental justice and report on progress on APCD's Annual Report
3. Engage environmental justice stakeholders and the CAPP Community in policy and budget development, monitoring network planning, and planning efforts to meet air quality standards and protect public health
4. Implement and expand the CAPP in environmental justice communities

GOAL 4: Improve APCD's outreach and education efforts in communities, with a special focus on disadvantaged communities most affected by pollution.

Background: APCD must listen and collaborate with a diverse range of communities throughout the region and incorporate community decision-making into its programs. However, many communities continue to be disproportionately burdened by air pollution and are more vulnerable to its impacts. To achieve environmental justice APCD must engage with these communities using an equity lens to achieve meaningful participation.

Strategies:

1. Develop and implement a Public Participation Plan to improve the effectiveness of APCD's public outreach and engagement activities in communities regionwide and to enhance transparency and accessibility of information
2. Foster increased community involvement on the rule development, permitting, budget, and other processes.
3. Enhance language access/multi-lingual community relations
4. Increase awareness of the APCD's Complaint Program and ensure accessibility for communities regionwide

GOAL 5: Collaborate with other organizations and government agencies to address air quality challenges more comprehensively.

Background: Air pollution comes from many sources. APCD has regulatory oversight of stationary sources of air pollution in the county; however, motor vehicles remain the largest source of air pollution in the region. Additionally, the Tijuana-San Diego binational border region presents unique challenges by being one of the most dynamic international borders with some of the busiest ports of entry in the nation. This highlights the importance of seeking collaborative opportunities with other organizations and government agencies to address air quality challenges more comprehensively. The OEJ will seek to expand our partnerships with outside organizations and agencies, including on the Mexican side of the border, to help improve air quality and support environmental justice in the region.

Strategies:

1. Advocate for and support policies and regulations that reduce air pollution from mobile sources
2. Partner with organizations and government agencies to comprehensively address air pollution, including federal agencies like the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, State agencies like the California Air Resources Board, and local government like the County of San Diego's Office of Environmental and Climate Justice
3. Collaborate and share information with Mexican government agencies to increase understanding of shared air quality challenges in the binational air basin and work towards collaborative solutions