

Green Zones Initiative:

Transforming Toxic Hot Spots into Thriving Communities

Imagine a state made up of thriving communities. Each urban neighborhood and every rural community across California has the means to generate healthy jobs, reduce and prevent industrial pollution, provide open space and organic food, develop affordable housing, preserve local culture, and conduct community-led planning to sustain this vibrant future.

This vision can become a reality through the California Environmental Justice Alliance (CEJA)'s Green Zones Initiative. We believe that by improving conditions for those most impacted by pollution and poor planning, we can improve conditions for all of California. With overburdened communities leading the way, communities, government, and businesses can collaborate to transition toxic hotspots into thriving Green Zones. Together, we can cultivate dozens of vibrant communities and advance visionary policies, so Green Zones can become a model for strengthening local economies, environments, and democracies across California and the country.



Community leaders from the Environmental Health Coalition plan their vision for a "Green Zone" in National City, CA.

What is a Green Zone?

- A Green Zone is a community undergoing an organized transition from a toxic hotspot to a vibrant and healthy place to live, work and play. This transition is led by the community itself, and achieved through an innovative model of collaboration among community leaders, government allies, and green businesses.
- By identifying Green Zones – communities that need to transition from toxic hotspots into healthy neighborhoods - we can direct a whole range of resources and programs into these areas.

How does the Initiative work?

CEJA's Green Zones Initiative is a transformative approach to improving conditions in overburdened communities.

Our initiative consists of three components:

1. Identifying overburdened communities
2. Advancing visionary Green Zones policy
3. Supporting seven local anchor campaigns to demonstrate the effectiveness of Green Zones

Identifying overburdened communities

Low-income communities and communities of color have been bearing the brunt of pollution for too long -- too many of our communities suffer from asthma, cancers, and other illnesses borne from heavy industrial pollution. Our neighborhoods face a daily onslaught from multiple facilities, not just one factory or highway. These toxins form a deadly combination with factors like high unemployment and poverty. Unfortunately, environmental regulations only look at pollution on a case-by-case basis and in isolation, rather than the "cumulative impacts" in an area.

While the Green Zones Initiative recognizes that we can all breathe easier and live better when we improve conditions for those most impacted, it can be difficult for policy makers to identify overburdened communities. With the help of CEJA, the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) has developed a cumulative impact screening tool that can identify highly impacted areas. With the "CalEnviroScreen" tool we are able to link identified communities to visionary Green Zone policies.

Advancing Visionary Policy

Green Zones Initiative is about policy that follows community priorities. Grounded in the local organizing of our anchor campaigns, we have developed a comprehensive, statewide Green Zones program that will finally move our state away from environmental siloes and towards transformation of toxic hotspots. Our program starts by identifying highly impacted communities with the CalEnviroScreen, and then directs a range of benefits and programs into our communities. We believe Green Zones should be first in line for resources, regulatory attention, and green business development.

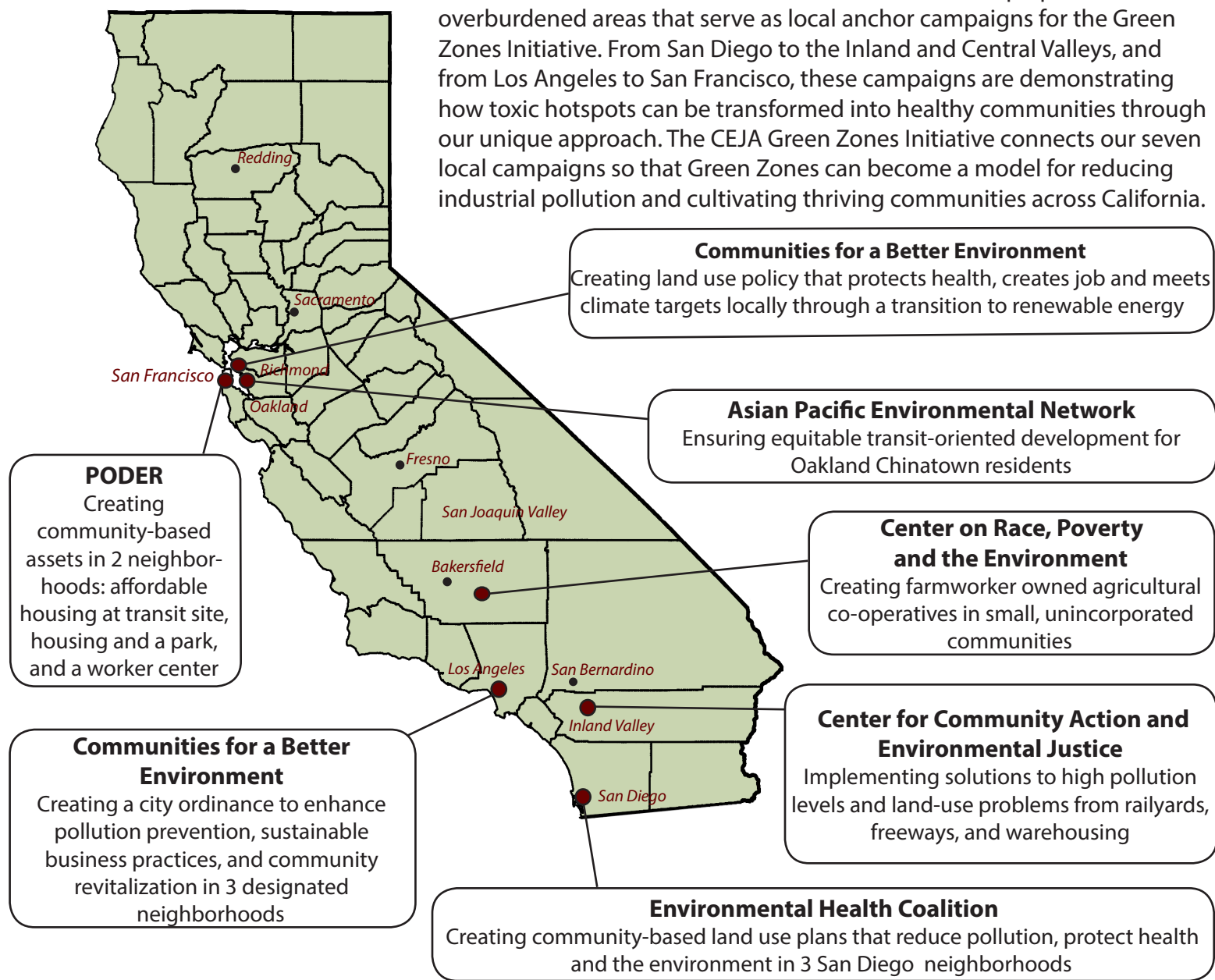
Elements of a statewide Green Zone program:

Our program tackles key environmental justice issues and has the potential to benefit hundreds of environmental justice communities throughout California.

- Increased resources for Green Zone communities
- Enhanced public participation in overburdened areas
- Changes in permitting to limit new polluting facilities
- Targeted environmental enforcement to lower pollution levels
- Improved land-use planning to address the unhealthy mix of side-by-side homes and industry
- Incentives for green economic development

Local Green Zone Campaigns

The CEJA Green Zones Initiative offers a way for our communities take their health into their own hands. CEJA members have pinpointed 7 overburdened areas that serve as local anchor campaigns for the Green Zones Initiative. From San Diego to the Inland and Central Valleys, and from Los Angeles to San Francisco, these campaigns are demonstrating how toxic hotspots can be transformed into healthy communities through our unique approach. The CEJA Green Zones Initiative connects our seven local campaigns so that Green Zones can become a model for reducing industrial pollution and cultivating thriving communities across California.



The California Environmental Justice Alliance (CEJA) is a statewide coalition of community-based groups working to advance environmental justice in statewide policy.

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